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External balance swings to surplus after 3yrs

MD MEHEDI HASAN

The country's balance of payments returned to a surplus in the fiscal year (FY) 2024-25, ending a three-year spell of deficits.

The turnaround has been attributed to stronger remittance inflows, foreign aid, a flexible exchange rate, and tighter fiscal measures.

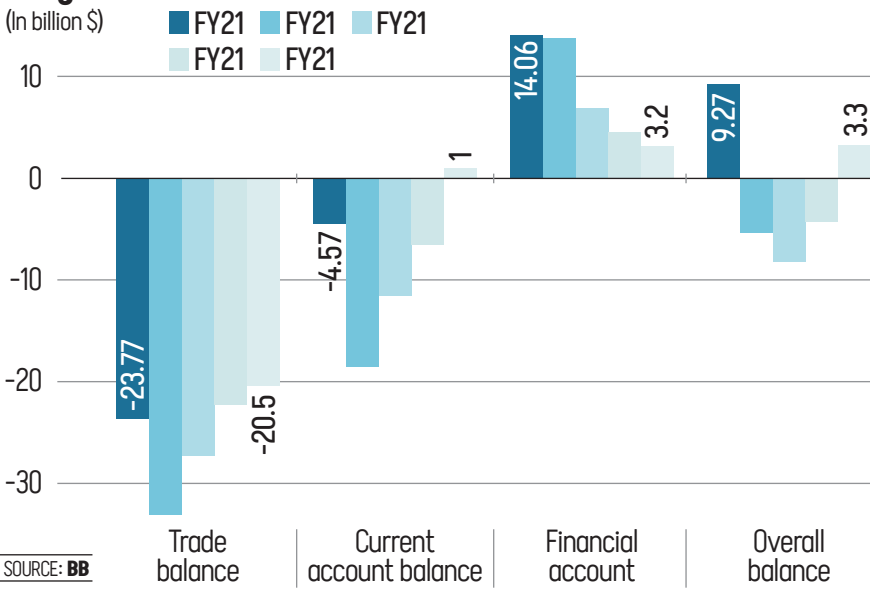
According to the Bangladesh Bank data, the overall balance of payments posted a surplus of \$3.3 billion at the end of FY25, bouncing back from a \$4.3 billion deficit the previous year.

The country recorded deficits of \$8.22 billion in FY23 and \$5.38 billion in FY22. The last time the external balance was in surplus was in FY21, when it stood at \$9.27 billion.

The balance of payments tracks the difference between what the country earns from the rest of the world and what it spends abroad.

In its Monetary Policy Statement (MPS) for the July-December period of FY26, the central bank said the external sector's

Bangladesh's external balance



recovery was evident in the return to a surplus, the rise in foreign exchange reserves, and a more stable exchange rate.

It also said the main driver

of this improvement was the current account balance, which returned to surplus after a large deficit. The financial account also posted a surplus, though to a lesser extent than in previous years.

The current account recorded a \$1 billion surplus in FY25, which was \$6.6 billion in deficit in FY24, showed data. Meanwhile, the financial account ended the just-concluded year with a \$3.2 billion surplus.

The recovery was powered by higher remittance inflows and

Bangladesh's export outlook still sensitive: BRAC EPL

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The overall export outlook of Bangladesh remains sensitive to broader global tariff realignments despite the reciprocal tariff cut offering relief, BRAC EPL Stock Brokerage said in a special brief.

The brokerage house issued the brief after the US announced a 20 percent tariff on Bangladesh's exports to its market, 17 percentage points lower than the tariff initially announced by the Trump administration.

It significantly enhances the country's competitive position, BRAC EPL said.

The report said Bangladesh has secured parity with major garment exporters like Vietnam, Pakistan, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka in the US apparel market following the reduction.

Despite the cut, Bangladeshi exporters will still face a total duty burden of about 35 percent, the report said.

However, Bangladesh's well-developed RMG infrastructure gives the country greater bargaining power to negotiate cost pass-throughs with buyers, the brokerage house added. India, for instance, currently faces a 25 percent reciprocal tariff.

However, a possible free trade agreement or

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LG eyes green growth with RANCON partnership

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

LG Electronics is set to expand its presence in the country's energy-efficient air solutions market through a strategic partnership with RANCON Group, company officials announced yesterday.

To mark the collaboration, senior executives from LG's global and regional leadership visited RANGS eMART showroom in Gulshan of Dhaka. The visit was aimed at evaluating the market's readiness for LG's environmentally friendly and energy-saving air solutions and deepening ties with its long-standing partner RANCON.

At a formal event in the capital, Jaesung Lee, president of LG EcoSolution Company, unveiled the brand's latest range of heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) products designed specifically for Bangladesh.

"In response to the rapidly evolving needs of Bangladesh's residential and commercial sectors, we are introducing a solution that not only ensures effective temperature control but also sets new benchmarks in energy efficiency, indoor air quality, and intelligent system management," said Lee.

The company's offerings under LG EcoSolution include room air conditioners, conversion-type units, industrial chillers, and air purifiers. Company officials said these products have been tailored to suit the environmental and climatic conditions of Bangladesh.

Highlighting the country's potential as a key growth market, Lee noted its demographic

Rod prices hit 3-year low as demand dries up

JAGARAN CHAKMA

Steel rod prices have fallen below Tk 90,000 per tonne for the first time in more than three years, as construction demand continues to fall amid reduced government spending and economic uncertainty.

The retail price of 60-grade mild steel (MS) rod, widely used by construction sites and infrastructure projects, dropped 12 percent year-on-year last week to between Tk 85,000 and Tk 89,000 per tonne, down from Tk 97,500 to Tk 99,500 a year ago, according to Trading Corporation of

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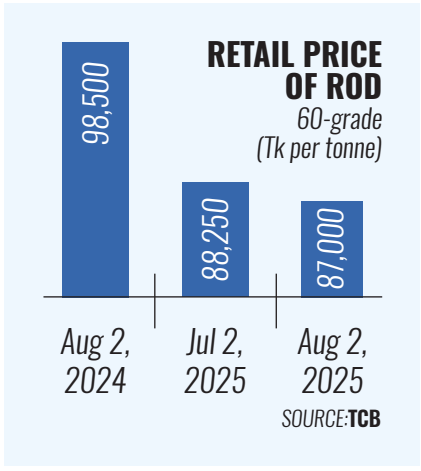
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Bangladesh (TCB) data.

Prices are now lower than they were on March 23, 2022, when a tonne sold for Tk 91,500. At its peak in mid-2024, the price neared Tk 1 lakh.

Before the political changeover in August last year, the country consumed around 6.5 lakh tonnes of MS rod each month, according to the Bangladesh Steel Manufacturers Association (BSMA). Since then, demand has steadily declined to about 4 lakh tonnes in recent months, a drop of roughly 35 percent.

BSMA said public construction and large-scale government projects, which usually account for nearly two-thirds of domestic steel consumption, have been in consistent decline since July last year.

"In just minutes, the price dropped 9 percent on July 27 this year. In such volatility, running a business is very difficult," said Sumon Chowdhury, secretary general of the BSMA.

Chowdhury said domestic demand has almost disappeared. "It is a major concern for the industry," he said, citing the lowest Annual Development Programme (ADP) implementation in 49 years as a key factor behind the slump.

He added that smaller producers such as Bandar Steel and Mohammadi Steel have suspended production due to limited access to bank finance. "Many mills cannot survive under current conditions," said Chowdhury.

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Page 1/1

Dhaka Bank declares 10% dividend

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Dhaka Bank PLC has recently declared a 10 percent dividend, including a five percent cash dividend, for the year ended on December 31, 2024.

The announcement was made during the bank's 30th annual general meeting (AGM), which was held virtually, according to a press release.

Abdul Hai Sarker, chairman of Dhaka Bank, presided over the meeting.

ATM Hayatuzzaman Khan, founder vice-chairman of the bank; Reshadur Rahman, Md Amir Ullah, Tahidul Hossain Chowdhury, Abdullah Al Ahsan, Mirza Yasser Abbas, Jashim Uddin and Manoara

Khandaker, directors; Khandaker Jamil Uddin, sponsor; Altaf Hossain Sarker, former director; Bilkis Ara Begum and Feroz Ahmed, independent directors; along with a good number of shareholders, joined the meeting.

Shareholders also offered their valuable opinions on the audited financial statements for 2024 and the overall activities of the bank.

Among others, Sheikh Mohammad Maroof, managing director and chief executive officer of the bank; Md Shahjahan Miah, company secretary; and Sahabub Alam Khan, senior executive vice-president and chief financial officer; were also present.



PHOTO: DHAKA BANK

Abdul Hai Sarker, chairman of Dhaka Bank PLC, presides over the bank's 30th annual general meeting, which was held virtually recently. At the meeting, a 10 percent dividend, including a five percent cash dividend, was declared for 2024.

City Bank posts 21% rise in profit in H1



Mahbubur Rahman, acting managing director and chief financial officer of City Bank PLC, delivers a presentation on the bank's financial performance for the second quarter of 2025 during its recently held half-yearly earnings disclosure webcast.

PHOTO: CITY BANK

STAR BUSINESS DESK

City Bank PLC has reported a 21 percent rise in consolidated profit after tax to Tk 301.11 crore for the first half of the current year, up from Tk 249.51 crore in the same period last year.

The announcement was made during the bank's half-yearly earnings disclosure webcast, held virtually, according to a press release issued by the bank.

The event brought together existing and potential investors, researchers, analysts, and other capital market stakeholders from around the world.

The bank's consolidated earnings per share (EPS) stood at Tk 2.23 for the half-year ending June 2025, compared to Tk 1.85 during the corresponding period of

the previous year.

Mahbubur Rahman, acting managing director and chief financial officer of City Bank, delivered a presentation on the bank's financial performance in the second quarter of 2025 and outlined both current initiatives and future strategic directions.

A lively question-and-answer session followed the presentation, during which participants shared their views and posed questions that were addressed by the bank's senior management.

Mesbaul Asif Siddiqui, deputy managing director and head of wholesale banking; AKM Saif Ullah Kowchar, deputy managing director and head of internal control & compliance; and Mohammad Firoz Alam, chief risk officer, were also present.

Midland Bank, TallyKhata join forces to support small businesses

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Midland Bank PLC has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with TallyKhata, a pioneering digital bookkeeping and payment platform in Bangladesh, with the aim of digitally empowering millions of small businesses across the country.

Under the terms of the MoU, TallyKhata will utilise Midland Bank's advanced API and banking infrastructure to facilitate account opening and seamless digital transactions through TallyKhata's digital wallet "TallyPay", a payment service provider (PSP) licensed by the Bangladesh Bank.

The partnership is centred on enhancing access to essential banking services, thereby significantly benefitting the underserved micro, small and medium enterprise (MSME) sector throughout Bangladesh.

Mohd. Javed Tarek Khan, head of institutional banking division at Midland Bank, and Shahadat Khan, chief executive officer of TallyKhata, signed the MoU at the bank's head office in Dhaka, according to a press release issued by the bank.



Mohd Javed Tarek Khan, head of institutional banking division at Midland Bank PLC, and Shahadat Khan, chief executive officer of TallyKhata, pose for photographs after signing the memorandum of understanding at the bank's head office in Dhaka recently.

PHOTO: MIDLAND BANK

Expressing his enthusiasm, Shahadat Khan stated, "This partnership significantly strengthens our ability to reach and serve the MSME sector, fostering greater financial inclusion across Bangladesh."

Md Zahid Hossain, deputy managing director of

the bank, remarked, "Our partnership with TallyKhata represents a meaningful step toward leveraging digital innovation for inclusive financial growth."

"Together, we aim to bring millions of small businesses into the formal financial ecosystem," he added.

Shahjalal Islami Bank holds half-yearly business conference

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Shahjalal Islami Bank PLC yesterday organised a "Half-Yearly Business Conference 2025" at the Radisson Blu Water Garden Hotel in the capital.

AK Azad, chairman of the bank, inaugurated the conference as chief guest, according to a press release.

Mosleh Uddin Ahmed, managing director of the Shahjalal Islami

Bank, presided over the event.

During the conference, speakers reviewed the bank's business performance over the first six months of the current year and emphasised the need to adopt appropriate strategies and action plans to achieve the business targets for the remainder of the year.

Mohammed Younus, vice-chairman of the bank; Nasir Uddin Ahmed and Md Reazul

Karim, independent directors; Imtiaz U Ahmed, additional managing director; and Rashed Sarwar and MM Saiful Islam, deputy managing directors, were present.

Md Abul Bashar, company secretary, moderated the programme and provided a comprehensive overview of the achievements recorded in the first half of 2025.



PHOTO: SHAHJALAL ISLAMI BANK

AK Azad, chairman of Shahjalal Islami Bank PLC, poses for group photographs with participants of the "Half-Yearly Business Conference 2025" at the Radisson Blu Water Garden Hotel in Dhaka yesterday.

In Bangladesh, Visa sees huge digital

FROM PAGE B4

Gupta said, "In every market we operate, we've taken this journey with partners, regulators, and customers. It's not a sprint. It's an ecosystem-building exercise."

A significant concern for Bangladesh's digital economy, however, is security. With increasing digital usage comes a spike in fraud. To that end, Visa has invested over \$10 billion in security, of which \$500 million is focused solely on AI-powered fraud detection.

Last year, Visa blocked over \$40 billion worth of fraudulent transactions globally.

"In Asia Pacific, we estimate that a small business suffers around three fraud incidents a year. So our approach includes everything from real-time dashboards for businesses

to admin-controlled category blocking on commercial cards," Gupta said. "This is particularly important for developing economies, where financial literacy is still maturing."

Visa's strategy also places emphasis on educating users and promoting responsible digital behaviour.

Gupta highlighted that Visa gives businesses control over how their employees use corporate cards, right down to which merchant categories can be accessed.

As Visa builds out its footprint, it is also actively engaging with stakeholders across sectors. The company recently hosted a commercial payments conclave in Dhaka, attended by representatives from Bangladesh Bank, major private banks, and MSME support

organisations. The event also featured insights from HDFC Bank, one of India's largest private lenders, offering Bangladesh a look into what's possible when digital payments are scaled.

"The aim was to spark a conversation about how the financial ecosystem can come together to better serve MSMEs and accelerate the shift to digital payments," said Ahmed.

In her concluding remarks, Gupta emphasised Visa's long-term commitment.

"Bangladesh presents a tremendous opportunity. From 12 crore account holders, only 3.5 crore have debit cards, and just 23 lakh credit cards are in circulation. The potential to scale is massive. We are here for the long haul, with the right policies, partners, and technology."

Gold rises nearly 2%

REUTERS

Gold prices rose almost 2 percent, hitting a one-week high, on Friday after weaker-than-expected US payrolls data boosted Federal Reserve rate cut expectations and fresh tariff announcements spurred safe haven demand.

Spot gold reached its highest level since July 25, adding 1.8 percent to \$3,347.66 per ounce as of 0148 p.m. ET (17:48 GMT), after rising as much as 2 percent earlier today. Bullion was up 0.4 percent during the week.

US gold futures settled 1.5 percent higher at \$3,399.8.

"Payrolls numbers came in below expectations, but a little higher than the market was printing. So, this gives a better probability that the Federal Reserve will cut (rates) later in the year," said Bart Melek, head of commodity strategies at TD Securities.

Gold, a non-yielding asset, tends to perform well in a low-interest-rate environment.

US job growth slowed more than expected in July, with nonfarm payrolls increasing by 73,000 jobs last month, after rising by a downwardly revised 14,000 in June, the Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics said.

Market participants are now anticipating two rate cuts by year end, beginning in September.

Earlier this week, the US central bank left interest rates unchanged in the 4.25 percent-4.50 percent range, with Fed Chair Jerome Powell saying "we haven't made any decisions about September."

"We've got a situation where we have inflationary pressures continuing from tariffs and wages, yet job numbers are disappointing. So in that situation, if the Fed cuts (rates), that's going to have material impact on gold in a positive way," Melek added.

Dollar tumbles

REUTERS, New York

The dollar dropped on Friday and was on track for its biggest daily loss against the yen since January 2023 after data showed that US employers added fewer jobs in July than economists had expected, while last month's jobs gains were revised sharply lower, leading traders to ramp up bets on how many times the Federal Reserve is likely to cut rates this year.

Employers added 73,000 jobs last month, below the 110,000 expected by economists polled by Reuters, while the unemployment rate edged higher to 4.2 percent, as anticipated, up from 4.1 percent in June. Job gains for June were revised down to 14,000, from the previously reported 147,000.

"It's worse than anyone expected and the kicker is that downward revision for the prior month too," said Helen Given, director of trading at Money USA in Washington.

The dollar index, which measures the greenback against a basket of currencies including the yen and the euro, was last down 1.23 percent on the day at 98.80.

The euro rose 1.37 percent to \$1.1571 and was on track for its biggest daily gain since April. The single currency reached \$1.1389 earlier on Friday, the lowest since June 10.



Ahmed Ismet, chairman of Bangladesh Development Bank PLC, presides over the bank's 15th annual general meeting at its head office in Dhaka recently. Mohammad Helal Uddin, joint secretary of the financial institutions division at the Ministry of Finance, attended the meeting as the government representative. KM Tariquul Islam, Md Abdul Mojib Md Shah Alam, Sultan Mahmud Bin Zulfiqar, Md Shah Alam Mia, Mahbubun Nahar and Md Chaynul Haque, directors, Md Jashim Uddin, managing director and CEO; and Shachindra Nath Samadder, deputy managing director; were also present.

PHOTO: BANGLADESH DEVELOPMENT BANK

Islami Commercial Insurance declares 10% dividend

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Islami Commercial Insurance PLC has declared a 10 percent cash dividend for the financial year that ended on December 31, 2024.

The declaration was made during the insurer's 25th annual general meeting (AGM), held at the Institution of Diploma Engineers, Bangladesh (IDEB) Bhaban in the capital's Kakrail recently, according to a press release.

Touseef Mashrurul Karim, vice-chairman of the company, presided over the meeting as chief guest.

Nusrat Jahan Tania, Md Ashik Hossain, and Mohammed Ayub Hossain, directors of the insurance company, attended the meeting.

During the meeting, shareholders approved the audited financial statements and the directors' report for 2024.

They expressed hope that the management would continue their

dedicated efforts to deliver even stronger results in the future.

Qazi Mukarram Dastagir, chief executive officer of the insurer; Md Akhtaruzzaman, company secretary;

and AKM Motaque Ahmed Khan, chief financial officer; along with shareholders Md Reazul Karim, Niaz Ahmed, Azmat Niaz, and Hasib Ahmed, were also present.



Touseef Mashrurul Karim, vice-chairman of Islami Commercial Insurance PLC, presides over the insurer's 25th annual general meeting at the Institution of Diploma Engineers, Bangladesh (IDEB) Bhaban in the capital's Kakrail recently. The shareholders declared a 10 percent cash dividend for 2024 at the meeting.

PHOTO: ISLAMI COMMERCIAL INSURANCE

Submarine cable firm crosses 4 Tbps bandwidth

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

State-owned Bangladesh Submarine Cables PLC (BSCPLC) has crossed a significant milestone by delivering 4 terabits per second (Tbps) of real-time international internet bandwidth.

This achievement came on August 1, after the company began delivering 200 Gbps of bandwidth for Starlink's newly launched commercial satellite internet service in Bangladesh in July, according to a statement.

Previously, on April 28 this year, the BSCPLC had crossed the 3 Tbps mark—meaning the company has added 1 Tbps of capacity in just three months.

In comparison, bandwidth usage had grown by only 1.1 Tbps over the previous eight months.

During the previous Awami League government's tenure, over 65 percent of the BSCPLC's capacity remained unused, according to the press release.

However, under the current administration, the company's total bandwidth delivery has increased by over 2.2 Tbps, representing a growth of more than 105 percent in just one year.

The recent achievement is attributed to policy support and guidance from the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications, efforts of the company's management, and two rounds of strategic price reductions.

As the BSCPLC's share in the country's total bandwidth usage continues to rise, the company has also seen a significant boost in its revenue collection.

In a notable regulatory move, Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) recently amended its licensing guidelines to require all international internet gateway (IIG) operators to source at least 50 percent of their total bandwidth from submarine cable networks.

This aims to reduce the country's previous over-reliance on Indian terrestrial bandwidth routes and encourage greater use of domestic submarine capacity.



Jute processing is currently going on following the cutting and retting of jute stalks. Farmers standing in waist-deep water are separating the fibre and sticks from the stalks. The jute will then be dried under the sun. In the local market, each maund of jute is being sold for Tk 4,000. The photo was taken in the Barugram area of Baliakandi upazila, Rajbari district recently.

PHOTO: SUZIT KUMAR DAS

Reform companies law to meet global standards: DCCI

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Business leaders and experts have urged the government to modernise the Companies Act 1994 to better align it with current business practices and global standards.

They made the call at a workshop organised by the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) at its auditorium in the capital yesterday.

DCCI President Taskeen Ahmed said the importance of institutional transparency, accountability, and good governance in the management of limited companies was increasing with the economic progress of Bangladesh and the development of the industrial sector.

He also said many entrepreneurs or company professionals often get confused due to a lack of clear understanding of the complexities of company law, constitutions, or compliance issues.

AKM Nurunnabi Kabir, registrar at the Office of the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies and Firms (RJSC), said currently about 2.75 lakh business enterprises in Bangladesh are registered with the RJSC.

Almost all processes related to company registration are now available online, except

Currently about 2.75 lakh business enterprises in Bangladesh are registered with the RJSC

for the share transfer system. However, there are plans to incorporate this service online after necessary security evaluations, he added.

To run a business, all stakeholders must comply with rules and regulations to avoid untoward incidents, he said.

He also suggested that business owners train their professionals in the various procedures under the companies act, articles

of association, securities law, and other related laws.

Mohammed Sanaullah, chief executive officer and lead consultant of Sanaullah & Associates, and Md Selim Reza, a partner of ARTISAN-Chartered Accountants, presented two separate keynote papers.

Every category of business must comply with laws and regulations whether it is public limited, private limited, or proprietorship, they said.

They also noted that Bangladesh's economy was expanding daily with the contribution of businesspeople.

In this era of globalisation, compliance to regulation in business is essential to compete in the international market, they added.

They further stated that following the rules would help prevent malpractice and misuse.

They concluded by stressing that the companies act of Bangladesh is outdated and should be reformed.

CPA seeks shipping agents' loss data for customs shutdown

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) has sought information from shipping agents regarding financial losses they incurred for an increase in the time that vessels had to stay in the Chattogram port for a recent work abstention observed by customs officials.

In a letter sent to the chairman of Bangladesh Shipping Agents' Association (BSAA) on July 31, the CPA requested that loss estimates be submitted within three working days to a committee it had formed.

The committee has been tasked with assessing the economic impact of the disruptions at the Chattogram port and related institutions.

The letter was signed by CPA Traffic Officer for Operations Md Rokonzaman, who serves as member secretary of the committee led by the CPA deputy traffic manager for operations.

According to the letter, customs officials observed a complete shutdown for two days on June 28 and 29.

In addition, they carried out intermittent work abstentions or pen-down strikes for around 59 hours between May 14 and June 26 as a part of a broader programme led by employees of the customs, VAT, and income tax departments.

These work abstention programmes led to delays in customs clearance and vessel handling, significantly increasing ship waiting times at the port.

This disrupted regular operations and caused financial strain for stakeholders, particularly shipping agents.

CPA Secretary Md Omar Faruk said a committee has been formed by the National Board of Revenue to determine the extent of losses caused to the port and its users during the period, and it has sought data from the CPA.

In response, the CPA formed a committee to collect the data from related organisations, he said.

Eurozone inflation unchanged in July

AFP, Brussels

Eurozone inflation remained stable in July, official data showed Friday, confounding expectations that consumer price rises would ease.

Inflation in the single currency area stood at 2.0 percent last month, the EU's statistics agency said, sustained in part by a smaller drop in energy prices than a month earlier.

Analysts surveyed by FactSet and Bloomberg had predicted inflation would ease to 1.9 percent, but the July figure remained in line with the European Central Bank's two-percent target.

Core inflation, which strips out volatile energy, food, alcohol and tobacco prices, was also unchanged at 2.3 percent, as economists had forecast.

Energy prices, however, fell by 2.5 percent in July – a smaller drop than the decline of 2.6 percent recorded in June, Eurostat data showed.

Meanwhile, food and drink price increases accelerated to 3.3 percent last month, after registering 3.1 percent in June.

In contrast, services price rises eased to 3.1 percent in July, from 3.3 percent in June.

LG eyes green growth with RANCON

FROM PAGE B1

advantage and appetite for innovation. "Bangladesh is not only defined by its large population, but also by its unmatched passion and enthusiasm for progress," he said.

He also expressed confidence in the strength of their local partner. "During our meeting today, I saw that the RANCON Group has the strength and reliability to grow alongside LG Eco Solution. We look forward to building a strong and sustainable future together."

Romo Rouf Chowdhury, group managing director of RANCON Group, said, "In this era of technology and sustainability, partnering with a global brand like LG is a significant milestone for us. RANCON is committed to offering modern and impactful solutions to its customers."

"RANCON is committed to introducing advanced, efficient, and impactful solutions that not only meet the evolving needs of our customers but also contribute to the greater good of society. Together with LG, we aim to deliver products and services that elevate the standard of living," he added.

"We look forward to building a cleaner, more comfortable, and more sustainable future for Bangladesh," Chowdhury said.

The partnership is aligned with Bangladesh's push for industrial advancement and greener technologies, particularly the adoption of energy-efficient systems.

Globally known for its eco-friendly innovations, South Korea's LG Electronics has now officially launched its complete air solutions range in partnership with RANCON Group in Bangladesh.

The delegation included Seok Hoon Jang, president of RAC Business; Yeon Wook Jung, head of India Sales and Marketing; Kun Ho Lee, president of LG Electronics Singapore; and Gerald Chun, managing director of LG Electronics Singapore, Bangladesh Branch. Several other senior LG officials were also present.



Jaesung Lee, president of LG Eco Solution Company, and Romo Rouf Chowdhury, group managing director of RANCON, inaugurate the Complete Air Solutions, jointly launched by LG Electronics and RANCON Group, in the capital's Gulshan yesterday.

PHOTO: RANCON GROUP

From the RANCON side, attendees included Farhana Karim, managing director, and Yamin Sharif Chowdhury, divisional director of RANCON Electronics, along with other top executives.

Now available through a single trusted platform managed by RANCON, LG's advanced air systems bring cutting-edge technology to a wide range of users in Bangladesh, from homes to commercial spaces.

Featuring inverter technology, LG's air conditioners offer rapid cooling, low noise levels, and significant energy savings. They are designed to maintain steady, comfortable indoor temperatures across diverse climate conditions.

LG's chiller and Variable Refrigerant Flow (VRF) systems combine energy-efficient performance with modular design and smart controls, making them ideal for managing climate in large-scale infrastructure.

The air purifiers, fitted with HEPA filters and Plasmaster Ionizer technology, are built to remove dust, allergens, and airborne germs, helping to maintain a clean and healthy indoor environment throughout the day.

Bangladesh's

FROM PAGE B1

preferential access for India in the US market could pose long-term challenges to Bangladesh's RMG exports unless similar benefits are extended to Bangladesh.

While trans-shipment challenges for Bangladesh are yet to be clarified, the report noted that Vietnam has already faced such hurdles.

Before the third round of trade talks with the US, Bangladesh had pledged to increase imports from the US by \$3 billion under a package deal. Of this, \$1.5 billion will be through government-to-government arrangements.

Bangladesh imported goods worth \$2.54 billion from the US in FY24 and \$2.34 billion in FY23. The country now plans to double that figure to align with the tariff formula proposed by US President Donald Trump.

The interim government has already signed a five-year agreement to import 700,000 tonnes of wheat annually and approved an additional 220,000 tonnes.

Plans are also in place to increase LNG imports from the US and for the purchase of 25 Boeing aircraft. Further discussions on additional high-value imports are ongoing.

External balance swings to surplus

FROM PAGE B1

strong export earnings, while sluggish imports also played a role. The current account swung to a surplus of \$981 million, a remarkable improvement on the previous year's shortfall, as per the MPS.

"The current account turned positive because remittance inflows have been strong. That's one aspect. The second aspect is the financial account, which previously had a large deficit," Mustafizur Rahman, distinguished fellow at local think tank Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), told The Daily Star.

He said the financial account benefited from loans and assistance from the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and Asian Development Bank.

"With both the financial account and the current account now in surplus, the overall balance of payments has turned positive," he said. "This is certainly a positive development."

"As a result, two things have happened. Our exchange rate has become more stable, and if there is

any pressure on the exchange rate, the Bangladesh Bank has also created a half-billion-dollar fund to intervene in the market, when necessary," said the economist.

"So overall, this is definitely a good development for the economy, at least in terms of the external sector, where external balances have been stabilised. As a result, the exchange rate is stabilising, the forex reserves are increasing because of this surplus, and the previous import restrictions are now being eased."

The central bank in the MPS that steady global demand and a market-driven exchange rate helped lift exports by 8.6 percent to \$48.3 billion in FY25, up from \$44.5 billion a year earlier.

Imports, which had dropped by 11.1 percent in FY24, began recovering in FY25 as the foreign exchange market became more liquid.

Total imports grew by 2.4 percent, led by consumer goods and raw materials for the garment sector. However, the import of capital machinery remained weak, reflecting a lack of investment appetite, it said.

Rahman pointed out that the private sector had not yet resumed capital machinery imports in any meaningful way. However, he said restrictions were no longer necessary.

"If the macroeconomy remains stable, we may then see an increase in capital machinery imports by the private sector, and that could put some pressure on overall imports," he said.

"Now that our reserves are in a good position," he added, "if import pressure increases, the economy is now in a position to handle it."

"But we need to stay cautious, because demand might rise in the future."

Rahman also observed that while the financial account's surplus is a positive sign, it is largely debt-driven.

"The surplus is coming from the loans we are receiving," he said. "Against this, we have to provide debt servicing. So, in that sense, the structure is also positive. It's not just a surplus driven by a debt-creating financial account."

Rod prices hit 3-year low

FROM PAGE B1

Monsoon-related disruptions have worsened the situation. "Many government and private construction sites went under water," he added.

With rains continuing, Chowdhury, chairman of RRM Group, does not expect a rebound anytime soon. "Some are selling at Tk 85,000 or less just to keep their factories running."

He also commented that retail prices do not reflect the true state of the market. "Mill-gate rates are Tk 2,000 to Tk 3,000 lower. The situation is dire."

Tapan Sengupta, deputy managing director of BSRM, also pointed to the sustained downturn in the domestic steel market due to falling demand and prices.

He said production levels have remained steady, and the decline is

entirely demand-led. "When demand drops, prices follow. That is basic market economics," he said.

He added that while companies had seen profitability in the past, many are now struggling to meet fixed costs such as salaries, loan repayments, and utility bills.

"Many are selling stock at minimal margins just to remain operational," he said.

Quoting industry data, Sengupta said demand has dropped by as much as 35 percent in some areas. "This is more than seasonal, it is a continuous downturn since last year, compounded by the monsoon."

He believes any recovery will depend on the return of government-funded infrastructure work or fresh investment.

"The overall situation is far from ideal," said Mohammed Jahangir

Alam, managing director of GPH Ispat. "Payments in the construction sector have slowed, and most major projects are now on hold," he said.

Alam said political uncertainty has prompted both domestic and foreign investors to adopt a wait-and-see approach.

As a result, construction activity in cities has declined by 30 to 40 percent, while larger projects have seen a fall of up to 60 percent, he said.

However, he added that rural economic activity remains relatively stable. Road maintenance and smaller infrastructure works are still ongoing, though at a slower pace.

Heavy rainfall over the past six weeks has also disrupted production, further straining supply chains and manufacturing operations, according to Alam.



Shruti Gupta

In Bangladesh, Visa sees huge digital opportunity

Vice-President Shruti Gupta tells The Daily Star

MAHMUDUL HASAN

As Bangladesh moves towards a digital economy, it is prioritising cashless transactions.

Over the last five years, card-based transactions soared by 228 percent to reach Tk 41,407 crore in April 2025. Transactions through mobile financial services (MFS) are also surging.

But in reality, the progress is still modest, and the economy remains largely cash-dominated.

For Visa, one of the world's largest payment technology companies, this gap is not a challenge but a massive opportunity, according to Shruti Gupta, vice-president and head of Commercial and Money Movement Solutions (CMS) for India and South Asia.

During a recent visit to Dhaka, she emphasised the pivotal role Bangladesh could play in the company's growth plan for the South Asia region.

"Bangladesh is a key market for us, especially because a large part of the economy depends on micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs)," Gupta told The Daily Star in an interview during her visit. "Our vision -- to be the best way to pay and be paid -- aligns well with the government's push to reduce cash dependency and expand digital financial inclusion."

Visa's commercial and money movement division focuses on business-to-business (B2B) transactions, including domestic and cross-border payments.

Gupta explained how Visa is expanding beyond personal card products to provide tailored B2B solutions.

"We're not just selling a product, we're creating value. Whether it's a sole proprietor running a bakery or a medium-sized exporter, we give them

tools to transition to digital commerce easily," she said.

A central part of Visa's strategy is increasing the "pull factor", making digital payment adoption worthwhile. "Unless you give a small business a reason to use a card -- for instance, savings, convenience, or better working capital management -- they won't adopt it," she added. "We simplify needs, amplify benefits, and magnify opportunities."

However, despite the evident potential, Bangladesh's regulatory environment presents structural limitations. For instance, individuals face an annual foreign spending limit of \$12,000, and online transactions are

"Bangladesh Bank was very receptive to our policy recommendation to increase card usage in Bangladesh, and we are optimistic that some of these ideas, like business-specific quotas, will be taken under active consideration," said Ahmed.

Visa is also working to break down behavioural barriers to card use.

Asked if it is discouraging customers to make digital payments as many merchants still charge an additional 2 percent to 3 percent fee for card payments, Ahmed said Visa is not just pushing consumer-level change but also transforming the ecosystem by working with banks and retailers to normalise card acceptance.

said Ahmed, noting that four banks in Bangladesh have already signed up for the service.

Visa's offerings are structured around three pillars: consumer payments, commercial and money movement, and value-added services. On the commercial side, the company is pushing to make commercial credit cards a standard tool for MSMEs.

Gupta argued that this can close the credit gap, noting, "Commercial cards offer a credit period of 30-45 days, help build credit history, and serve as a gateway to more structured financing like overdrafts. SMEs deserve the same tools as individuals."

Visa is also working with the government to digitise Citizen-to-Government (C2G) payments. "From paying taxes online to remitting government fees digitally, these solutions increase transparency and reduce inefficiencies," said Gupta.

"One of the key issues with cash is the lack of traceability and the associated risk. Our aim is to bring transparency into the system. The more transparent the transactions, the higher the tax compliance -- and this is crucial for Bangladesh, which has one of the lowest tax-to-GDP ratios in Asia-Pacific," Ahmed explained further.

In this pursuit, Visa doesn't see itself in competition with MFS providers like bKash or other fintech entrants.

"If bKash were a competitor, we wouldn't have integrated our cards into their platform. But we did, because we're growing the ecosystem together," said Ahmed.

Visa has enabled card-to-wallet transfers and even supports QR-based Visa payments through bKash's network. "Cash is our competitor," he said.

READ MORE ON B2

TAKEAWAYS

Visa sees Bangladesh as a key market

Targets MSMEs for B2B payment growth

Working with govt to digitise C2G payments

Enabled card-to-wallet transfers thru bKash

Globally invested \$10b in security, including \$500m for AI fraud detection

capped at \$300 per payment. These restrictions often make it difficult for businesses to expand or advertise abroad.

Sabbir Ahmed, Visa's country manager for Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan, acknowledged these challenges. "The current limits are indeed restricting business usage."

He said Visa has made policy recommendations to the Bangladesh Bank, including the introduction of a separate travel quota for business purposes.

The idea is to allow business owners to spend abroad -- attend trade fairs, pay for digital advertising -- without exhausting their personal travel limits.

But Visa's ambitions in Bangladesh go beyond domestic purchases.

"Cross-border money movement is a huge opportunity," said Gupta. "Whether it's parents sending tuition fees abroad, workers remitting money home, or businesses making cross-border payments, our Visa Direct service allows faster, cheaper, and more transparent transactions than traditional methods."

The Visa Direct service allows individuals to send funds to eligible Visa cards, typically within minutes, through various platforms like online banking, mobile apps, or even ATMs.

"This could revolutionise how Bangladeshis move money globally,"

Will the next govt deliver real reform?

MAMUN RASHID

A half-built flyover cuts across the sky in Dhaka, its concrete pillars reaching upward with an unfinished span. It was meant to connect, to ease traffic, move people, and signal progress. Instead, it hangs over the city like a reminder: starting something is easy, but finishing takes resolve. Bangladesh's economic reform agenda mirrors this flyover. Promises were made, foundations laid, but the connection to lasting progress remains incomplete.

Today, reform is no longer optional. It is the difference between managing decline and engineering recovery. With a possible election ahead, a deeper question arises: will the next government have the clarity and courage to do what the last few could not?

Bangladesh is under pressure from all sides. Exports are struggling under new global tariffs, private investment is shrinking, and growth has slowed to its lowest point in over a decade. The World Bank's latest report outlines the toll: a drop in GDP, falling reserves, and rising inflation. This is not a temporary wobble. Without serious course correction, it could harden into long-term stagnation.

The interim government has taken some encouraging steps, such as separating tax policy from administration and tightening rules on insider lending. However, these moves are late, limited, and often reactive. Years of hesitation on energy pricing and VAT automation have left gaps that cannot be patched overnight.

The last elected government often signalled reform but rarely followed through. Banking sector cleanup was promised but deferred, tax reform was drafted but never executed at scale, and decisions that threatened

short-term popularity were quietly shelved. Now, the cost of delay is visible in every economic indicator and felt in every household budget.

As a new mandate nears, many are placing hope in a more democratic setup. An elected government, the thinking goes, will have more space to act boldly. But democracy does not guarantee discipline. Winning votes and making tough decisions are very different skills. Elected leaders often pivot to appeasement, especially when the public demands relief over reform. That is the paradox. The people want change, but also stability; leaders want progress, but not protests. Reforms, especially structural ones, almost always start with discomfort before results.

There is no doubt the next administration will inherit a weak economy and a fatigued population. It must rebuild confidence not just in markets, but in the public mindset. That means clear communication, policy consistency, and a readiness to tackle long-avoided issues.

Where to begin? First, clean up the financial sector. Non-performing loans remain dangerously high, so regulators must enforce discipline and resist pressure. Second, broaden the tax base. Only a small portion of the population contributes directly, and loopholes persist for the powerful. Third, attract serious foreign investment. That requires a predictable regulatory environment and faster reforms to improve the ease of doing business.

All hope is not lost. Inflation has started to cool, and the taka has found some stability, but these are only small gains. They could vanish with a single external shock or domestic misstep. The window for action is narrow, but it is open.

Reform agenda survives without public backing. That means involving civil society, communicating trade-offs honestly, and building coalitions beyond party lines. Reform cannot be whispered in donor meetings and ignored on national TV. It must be part of the national conversation.

Bangladesh has reached an inflection point. The global economy is shifting, and the old playbook of remittances, low-cost exports, and state-led infrastructure will not be enough. The next government must write a new chapter, one grounded in institutions, not slogans.

The writer is an economic analyst and chairman at Financial Excellence Ltd

Shahjalal Islami Bank's Q2 profit down 5%

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Shahjalal Islami Bank posted a slight decline in its profit for the April-June quarter of 2025, even as investment income edged higher.

The bank reported a 5 percent year-on-year drop in profit to Tk 159.40 crore during the second quarter, according to its recently released financial statements.

The bank's consolidated earnings per share for the period were Tk 1.43, a decrease from Tk 1.50 recorded in the same quarter of the previous year.

The bank's net investment income saw a marginal increase, rising by 2 percent to Tk 322.80 crore.

Despite the dip in quarterly profit, the bank's consolidated net operating cash flow per share (NOCFPS) rose significantly. For the January-June period, NOCFPS stood at Tk 15.39, up from Tk 12.48 in the same period of 2024.

The bank attributed this rise to an increase in investment income and a decrease in placements with other banks and financial institutions.

As of June 30, 2025, sponsor-directors held 45.30 percent shares, while institutions held 20.95 percent, foreign investors held 0.01 percent, and the public held the remaining 33.74 percent.

Trump stakes reputation as dealmaker

AFP, Washington

Donald Trump is staking his reputation as a tough negotiator and slick dealmaker -- that has served him well throughout his life -- with his ultra-muscular, protectionist tariffs policy.

On Friday, the White House released a picture of the US president seen with a smartphone pressed to his ear, with the caption: "Making calls. Making deals. MAKING AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!"

Every trade deal announced by the president, who is convinced that tariffs are both a tool and manifestation of America's economic might, is celebrated by his supporters as a show of his negotiating prowess.

This week's flurry of rate changes was no different.

On Thursday, with the stroke of a black marker, the former real estate developer slapped fresh tariffs on dozens of US trade partners.

They will kick in on August 7 instead of August 1, which had previously been touted as a hard deadline.

The Republican leader's backtracking, frequently setting trade deadlines only to rescind or extend them -- he most recently granted Mexico a 90-day extension -- has given rise to the mocking acronym "TACO" ("Trump always chickens out"). The jokes implying Trump is all talk and no action on trade have previously struck a nerve for the president.

Jamuna Bank's Q2 profit drops 8%

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Jamuna Bank saw its net profit decline in the April-June quarter of 2025, even as investment income increased.

The private commercial lender reported a consolidated net profit of Tk 131.54 crore in the second quarter, down 8 percent year-on-year, according to its recently released financial statements.

Its consolidated earnings per share (EPS) for the quarter were Tk 1.40, a decline from the restated Tk 1.53 recorded in the same period of 2024.

The bank, however, said its investment income as of June 30,

2025, increased compared to the previous year, a development the lender attributed to its strategic initiative to invest in government securities.

The bank also reported an increase in its interest income, as well as commission, exchange, and brokerage income, compared to the same period in the previous year.

The net interest income rose 19 percent year-on-year, rising to Tk 129.68 crore.

For the six months from January to June 2025, the consolidated net operating cash flow per share stood at Tk 47.31, a rise from the restated Tk 43.39 in the first half of 2024.

According to the bank's

financial statement, this increase was primarily due to higher investment income, increased fees and commissions, and borrowings from other banks.

The bank's net asset value per share as of June 30, 2025, was higher than at the end of 2024, mainly because of the increased net profit generated during the period.

Data from the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) shows that as of June 30, 2025, sponsors and directors held 43.16 percent of the company's shares. The public held the largest portion with 51.48 percent, while the remaining 5.36 percent was owned by institutional and foreign investors.

World economies reel from Trump's tariffs punch

AFP, Washington

Global markets reeled Friday after President Donald Trump's tariffs barrage against nearly all US trading partners as governments looked down the barrel of a seven-day deadline before higher duties take effect.

Trump announced late Thursday that dozens of economies, including the European Union, will face new tariff rates of between 10 and 41 percent.

However, implementation will be on August 7 rather than Friday as previously announced, the White House said. This gives governments a window to rush to strike deals with Washington setting more favorable conditions.

Neighboring Canada, one of the biggest US trade partners, was hit with 35 percent levies, up from 25 percent, effective Friday -- but with wide-ranging, current exemptions remaining in place.

The tariffs are a demonstration of raw economic power that Trump sees putting US exporters in a stronger position, while encouraging domestic manufacturing by keeping out foreign imports.

But the muscular approach has raised fears of inflation and other economic fallout in the world's biggest economy.

Stock markets in Hong Kong, London and New York slumped as they digested the turmoil, while weak US employment data added to worries.

Trump's actions come as debate rages over how best to steer the US economy,

with the Federal Reserve this week deciding to keep interest rates unchanged, despite massive political pressure from the White House to cut.

Data Friday showed US job growth missing expectations for July, while

unemployment ticked up to 4.2 percent from 4.1 percent. On Wall Street, the S&P 500 dropped 1.6 percent, while the Nasdaq tumbled 2.2 percent.

Trump raised duties on around 70 economies, from a current 10 percent level imposed in April when he unleashed "reciprocal" tariffs citing unfair trade practices.

The new, steeper levels listed in an executive order vary by trading partner. Any goods "transshipped" through other jurisdictions to avoid US duties would be hit with an additional 40 percent tariff, the order said.

But Trump's duties also have a distinctly political flavor, with the president using separate tariffs to pressure Brazil to drop the trial of his far-right ally, former president Jair Bolsonaro.

He also warned of trade consequences for Canada, which faces a different set of duties, after Prime Minister Mark Carney announced plans to recognize a Palestinian state at the UN General Assembly in September.

In targeting Canada, the White House cited its failure to "cooperate in curbing the ongoing flood of fentanyl and other illicit drugs" -- although Canada is not a major source of illegal narcotics.



People walk next to a screen with a stocks indicator in the Jing'an district in Shanghai. Stock markets worldwide slumped as they digested the turmoil, while weak US employment data added to worries.

PHOTO: AFP/FILE