



The country's largest floating guava market is held annually from July to August (corresponding to the Bengali months of Ashar to Bhadra) at Bhimruli Bazar in the Jhalakati district. Local guava farmers sell their produce directly from boats to traders. On average, between 1,200 and 1,500 maunds of guava are sold each day. In Shatodaskati village, the price per maund ranged from Tk 800 to Tk 1,000. Traders pack the guavas in plastic crates for shipment to Dhaka and other major cities across the country. The photo was taken at Shatodaskati village last week.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

No clear winner in US tariff policy among ASEAN countries

ANN/THE JAKARTA POST

The competition landscape in Southeast Asia has become clearer as the Aug. 1 tariff deadline set by the United States President Donald Trump passed with most countries in the region facing the same hurdle in exporting goods to the world's largest consumer market.

While there are no clear winners, Laos and Myanmar can be considered losers under a US policy that is shaking up global supply chains, as manufacturers in those countries are subject to a steep 40 percent US import duty.

Brunei Darussalam, meanwhile, got off somewhat lighter with 25 percent, but that is still high within the region.

Singapore received the lowest rate among ASEAN countries with a 10 percent US import tariff, unchanged from what the Trump administration had imposed at the start of Trump's tariff barrage in April.

However, export activity there involves higher operational costs, says researcher

Wen Chong Cheah from the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU).

Moreover, pharmaceuticals and semiconductors, two of Singapore's main export goods, are not among the key exports of any other ASEAN countries, meaning the city state was "less able" to leverage a lower tariff "to gain a competitive edge", said Cheah.

"Most of ASEAN is [subject to] similar [US import] tariff rates. It seems that we are back at square one. Among Indonesia's competitors in the region, none has a distinct edge in terms of export costs to the US," he told The Jakarta Post on Monday.

Trump announced on July 15 that Washington would impose a 19 percent tariff on Indonesia, the second-lowest tariff in the region. The government has hailed the figure as an achievement, since it is significantly lower than the 32 percent initially threatened.

Some had hoped the deal would tip the scales in favor of Indonesia, until it was subsequently unveiled that its regional peers Malaysia, Thailand and

the Philippines, received exactly the same 19-percent rate, along with Cambodia.

Exporters in manufacturing powerhouse Vietnam, meanwhile, have to contend with a marginally higher rate of 20 percent to access the US market.

That difference, however, was "negligible" and "insignificant" in changing the region's landscape for trade with the US, given Vietnam's capacity and efficiency, said Permata Bank chief economist Josua Pardede.

He told the Post on Monday that the 1-percent gap was too small to "fundamentally change trade patterns", since competitiveness was not solely driven by tariffs but also by production efficiency, logistical costs, product quality and business ties.

"Vietnam still enjoys a strong market position, particularly in the electronic industry, textiles and footwear. Such a small tariff difference is possibly not big enough to directly shift trade volumes from Vietnam to other ASEAN countries in a meaningful way in the short-term," said Josua.

Discounting Singapore, ASEAN's largest economies are subject to more or less the same rate, even though each played a different hand in the negotiations with Trump based on local economic characteristics and priorities. Indonesia was among the ASEAN countries offering "generous concessions" to the US, Cheah said.

Jakarta agreed to purchase 50 Boeing aircraft alongside US\$19.5 billion worth of agricultural and energy goods and offered wide-ranging regulatory reforms as well as tariff-free access to Indonesia for most US products.

Cheah highlighted the promise to rewrite local content requirements, the archipelago's long-established policy to protect local industries by forcing foreign investment onto Indonesian soil or into business ties with local producers.

"By conceding this point on local content requirements to the US, the Indonesian government has created a precedent that may make it difficult to implement a similar strategy in the future, even with other countries," explained Cheah.

Dollar edges up vs euro and yen

REUTERS

The dollar edged up against the euro and the yen, but remained within striking distance of Friday's lows, after weak US jobs data boosted bets on Federal Reserve rate cuts and triggered a sharp selloff in the greenback.

Goldman Sachs expects the Federal Reserve to deliver three consecutive 25 basis-point rate cuts starting in September, with a 50 basis-point move possible if the next jobs report shows a further rise in unemployment.

It also sees the European Central Bank as having concluded its easing cycle.

Economists raised their growth forecasts for the euro area and Japan following relatively benign trade agreements, while arguing that Friday's US jobs report confirmed the economy is hovering near stall speed.

Meanwhile the firing of the head of the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) on Friday, and the resignation of Fed Governor Adriana Kugler, could harden the views of the FOMC to ensure its independence is protected, analysts said, recalling that the new appointee will be just one vote on the Fed's Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC).

The euro was last down 0.12 percent at \$1.15592, after hitting on Friday \$1.15855.

The dollar index, which measures the US currency against six counterparts, was at 98.816, after touching a one-week low earlier in the session at 98.609.

"Traders likely inferred that the (US jobs) report gave President Donald Trump even more justification to 'fire' Jay Powell," said Thierry Wizman, global forex and rates strategist at Macquarie Group.

Gold hovers near two-week high

REUTERS

Gold prices steadied on Tuesday, hovering near a two-week high hit in the last session, as softer US jobs data bolstered hopes of a rate cut in September and weighed on the dollar, and Treasury yields.

Spot gold was trading at \$3,369.25 per ounce, as of 0629 GMT. Bullion hit its highest since July 24 on Monday. US gold futures was unchanged at \$3,423.20.

The dollar index traded near a one-week low, making gold more affordable to holders of other currencies.

The yield on the benchmark 10-year Treasury note also hit a one-month low.

"Short-term momentum has improved for the bullish side of the story... fundamental narrative supporting gold prices is that the Fed is still in the mode to actually cut rates in September," OANDA senior market analyst, Kelvin Wong, said.

US employment growth was softer than expected in July, while non-farm payroll figures for May and June were revised down by a massive 258,000 jobs, suggesting a deterioration in labour market conditions.

Traders now see a 90 percent chance of a September rate cut, per the CME FedWatch tool.

Gold, traditionally considered a safe-haven asset during political and economic uncertainties, tends to thrive in a low-interest-rate environment.

Tesla's brand loyalty collapsed after Musk backed Trump

REUTERS

Tesla for years had more repeat US customers than any other major automotive brand but its loyalty has plunged since CEO Elon Musk endorsed President Donald Trump last summer, according to data from research firm S&P Global Mobility shared exclusively with Reuters.

The data, which has not been previously reported, shows Tesla's customer loyalty peaked in June 2024, when 73 percent of Tesla-owning households in the market for a new car bought another Tesla, according to an S&P analysis of vehicle-registration data in all 50 states.

That industry-leading brand loyalty rate started to nosedive in July, that data showed, when Musk endorsed Trump following an assassination attempt in Pennsylvania on the Republican nominee.

The rate bottomed out at 49.9 percent last March, just below the industry average, after Musk launched Trump's budget-slashing Department of Government Efficiency in January and started firing thousands of government workers.

Tesla's US loyalty rate has since ticked back up to 57.4 percent in May, the most recent month the S&P data is available, putting it back above the industry average and about the same as Toyota but behind Chevrolet and Ford.

S&P analyst Tom Libby called it "unprecedented" to see the runaway leader in customer loyalty fall so quickly to industry-average levels. "I've never seen this rapid of a decline in such a short period of time," he said.

Tesla and Musk did not respond to requests for comment.

US trade deficit hits nearly 2-year low in June China gap plunges

REUTERS

The US trade deficit narrowed in June on a sharp drop in consumer goods imports, and the trade gap with China shrank to its lowest in more than 21 years, the latest evidence of the imprint on global commerce President Donald Trump is making with sweeping tariffs on imported goods.

The overall trade gap narrowed 16.0 percent in June to \$60.2 billion, the Commerce Department's Bureau of Economic Analysis said on Tuesday. Days after reporting that the goods trade deficit tumbled 10.8 percent to its lowest since September 2023, the government said the full deficit including services also was its narrowest since then.

Exports of goods and services totaled \$277.3 billion, down from more than \$278 billion in May, while total imports were \$337.5 billion, down from \$350.3 billion.

The diminished trade deficit contributed heavily to the rebound in US gross domestic product during the second quarter, reported last week, reversing a drag in the first quarter when imports had surged as consumers and businesses front-loaded purchases to beat the imposition of Trump's tariffs.

The economy in the second quarter expanded at a 3.0 percent annualised rate after contracting at a 0.5 percent rate in the first three months of the year, but the headline figure masked underlying indications that activity was weakening.

Last week Trump, ahead of a self-imposed deadline of August 1, issued a barrage of notices

informing scores of trading partners of higher import taxes set to be imposed on their goods exports to the US.

With tariff rates ranging from 10 percent to 41 percent on imports to the US set to kick in on August 7, the Budget Lab at Yale now estimates the average overall US tariff rate has shot up to 18.3 percent, the highest since 1934, from between 2 percent and 3 percent before Trump returned to the White House in January.

CHINA TRADE GAP

A centerpiece of Tuesday's report was the latest steep drop in the US trade deficit with China, which tumbled by roughly a third to \$9.5 billion in June to its narrowest since February 2004. Over five consecutive months of declines, it has narrowed by \$22.2 billion - a 70 percent reduction.

The US and China trade negotiators met last week in Sweden in the latest round of engagement over the trade war that has intensified since Trump's return. The US currently imposes a 30 percent tariff on most Chinese imports, which has fueled a steep drop off in inbound goods traffic from China. Imports from China dropped to \$18.9 billion, the lowest since 2009.

The trade negotiators have recommended that Trump extend an August 12 deadline for the current tariff rate to expire and snap back to more than 100 percent, where it had briefly been earlier this year after a round of tit-for-tat increases by both sides.

"We're getting very close to a deal," Trump said Tuesday in an interview on CNBC. "We're getting along with China very well."

Unified

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not be considered for a period of two years from the date the employee fulfils the disciplinary measure, it added.

SPECIALISED BANKS

PROMOTION CRITERIA

Promotion eligibility in specialised banks will involve a structured evaluation process.

For a candidate to be considered for promotion, he or she must meet the minimum qualifying marks determined by the board.

Of the total marks, 50 percent will be allotted from written examinations, 30 percent from oral assessments, and the remaining 20 percent from service record and training credentials.

The policy also outlines that employees must have a clean service record and should not have any unresolved disciplinary cases or penalties pending against them at the time of their promotion application submission.

Each bank will be required to form a dedicated promotion committee chaired by a senior executive, and the committee must include representatives from human resources and audit divisions to ensure checks and balances in the selection process.

Employees who fail to secure a promotion after three consecutive attempts despite being eligible will have their cases reviewed by a special board to investigate whether any procedural injustice or exceptional circumstance may have hindered their advancement.

Over 10,000

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Taxpayers can pay their taxes through bank transfers, debit or credit cards, and mobile financial services such as bKash, Rocket and Nagad. They can instantly download acknowledgement slips and tax certificates upon e-filing.

The NBR has also deployed a round-the-clock helpline through call centres and other digital platforms to assist taxpayers facing difficulties in filing income tax returns online.

Govt tightens

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Among bilateral development partners, Japan remains the largest lender, offering loans on flexible terms, including low interest and long repayment periods.

The island nation posted the highest project loan utilisation rate at 23.61 percent, even as its pipeline grew by \$309 million to reach \$7 billion by July.

China began offering project loans after President Xi Jinping's Dhaka visit in 2016. However, no new loans were approved in the last fiscal year. Only \$414 million from previously approved loans was disbursed, marking just 10.67 percent utilisation.

Russia has provided loans solely for the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant project, totalling around \$12 billion. The loan agreement was signed in 2016.

In the last fiscal year, 12.50 percent of this pipeline was utilised. Despite spending \$674 million, \$4.72 billion remained undisbursed at the beginning of July.

The slowest-moving project loans are from India. Just 3.10 percent of its pipeline was utilised last fiscal year, with \$184 million spent. At the beginning of the current fiscal year, \$5.73 billion remained undisbursed.

During the 2010-2017 period, India committed \$7.36 billion in loans. But a combination of complex loan conditions and bureaucratic issues in both countries has slowed project execution.

WHY PROJECTS DELAY

According to an ADB document, most projects, especially infrastructure ones, have failed to meet original implementation deadlines.

"Insufficient financial and human resources to prepare projects, complex and lengthy approval process of project and bid documents, challenges in land acquisition, limited experience and capacity of the Executing Agencies (EAs) and Implementing Agencies, and many

other factors led to poor project readiness and frequent extension of loan implementation periods."

The lender also identified issues with procurement, such as inadequate project preparation, subpar design quality, engineering estimates that fail to reflect market prices, and weak bid documents.

It also noted prolonged approval timelines within the government system and poor bid evaluation practices, which trigger repeated clarification rounds during ADB reviews.

Because of delays in implementation, Bangladesh ends up paying a huge amount in foreign currency every year.

For instance, total commitment charges over time have amounted to \$30.89 million. In 2024 alone, \$3.58 million was paid in such charges.

Saudi Aramco profit drops

REUTERS, Dubai

Saudi Arabian oil company Aramco reported a 22 percent drop in second-quarter profit on Tuesday, and the world's top oil exporter said it was cutting costs and looking to divest assets as crude prices drop and its debt mounts.

The firm's generous dividends, a key source of funding for ambitious plans to cut the kingdom's reliance on oil, will be about a third lower this year.

Aramco reported its 10th decline in quarterly net profit to \$22.7 billion in the quarter through June, from \$29.1 billion a year earlier.

Aramco's shares were up 0.3 percent at 23.98 riyals. They have dropped about 14.5 percent this year, trailing industry peers.

Adjusted net income fell 13.7 percent to \$24.5 billion, above a company-provided median analyst estimate of \$23.7 billion.