

Astha reaches 10 lakh users, sets record transactions

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Astha, the digital banking application of BRAC Bank PLC, has reached a landmark 10 lakh users, cementing its position as one of the country's trusted digital banking platforms for everyday financial needs.

In July 2025, the app achieved a milestone by facilitating transactions worth Tk 20,000 crore in a single month, the highest ever recorded by any banking app in Bangladesh's financial sector, according to a press release.

This achievement not only underscores Astha's soaring adoption but also reaffirms BRAC Bank's leadership in driving digital innovation. Positioned at the forefront of Bangladesh's digital financial revolution,

Astha empowers customers to take full control of their finances anytime, anywhere.

Commenting on the success, Mokerrobin Mannan, chief digital officer of BRAC Bank, said: Crossing the 10 lakh user mark demonstrates how deeply the app has become embedded in people's daily lives." "It is not merely about banking; it is about financial inclusion, lifestyle convenience, and building a future-ready digital ecosystem," he added.

Astha now offers a suite of banking and lifestyle services in the industry. With just a few taps, customers can open bank accounts instantly via eKYC without visiting a branch, register using multiple credentials – account number, debit/credit card, or DPS number – and apply



seamlessly for loans and cards. The app also provides ATM, branch, and merchant locators to ensure greater convenience.

Users enjoy real-time fund transfers through NPSB, BEFTN, RTGS, Visa Direct and wallet partners, alongside bill payments, mobile top-ups, and both Bangla QR and bKash QR-enabled cashless payments – all without queues,

hidden fees, or physical bank visits.

Astha further enhances customer convenience through cardless ATM withdrawals via code, standing instructions for recurring payments (including bKash, Rocket, and insurance premiums), and its innovative 'bKash Pull Money' feature, enabling seamless wallet-to-account or wallet-to-credit card transfers.

US-India trade talks scheduled for Aug called off

REUTERS

A planned visit by US trade negotiators to New Delhi from August 25-29 has been called off, a source said, delaying talks on a proposed trade agreement and dashing hopes of relief from additional US tariffs on Indian goods from August 27.

The current round of negotiations for the proposed bilateral trade agreement is now likely to be deferred to another date that has yet to be decided, the source with direct knowledge of the matter said. The US embassy in New Delhi said it has no additional information on the trade and tariff talks, which are being handled by the United States Trade Representative (USTR).

India's trade ministry did not immediately reply to a Reuters email seeking comments.

Earlier this month, US President Donald Trump imposed an additional 25 percent tariff on Indian goods, citing New Delhi's continued imports of Russian oil in a move that sharply escalated tensions between the two nations.

The new import tax, which will come into effect from August 27, will raise duties on some Indian exports to as high as 50 percent – among the highest levied on any US trading partner.

Trade talks between New Delhi and Washington collapsed after five rounds of negotiations over disagreement on opening India's vast farm and dairy sectors and stopping Russian oil purchases.

India's Foreign Ministry has said the country is being unfairly singled out for buying Russian oil while the United States and European Union continue to purchase goods from Russia.

StanChart shares fall 9% after US calls for probe

REUTERS, London

Standard Chartered shares fell nearly 9 percent on Friday after a US Republican lawmaker wrote to the Attorney General, Pam Bondi, asking for a probe to be launched into the bank, claiming it was involved in sanctions evasion.

Elise Stefanik, a New York Republican, requested in a letter shared on the X social media platform and published on her website that a special attorney be appointed to look into Standard Chartered's alleged failings.

Stefanik said that an unspecified case against Standard Chartered was due to expire next week and urged action before that date.

Standard Chartered said in a statement that the underlying allegations in a long-running civil case were "entirely false" and had been rejected by US courts multiple times.

The claimant had been pursuing the claims since 2012, the bank has previously said.

"We expect the dismissal of this case will continue to be upheld on appeal," the bank said on Friday, adding it would fully cooperate with any relevant authorities and was committed to fighting financial crime.

The Attorney General's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Prime Bank holds seminar on financial inclusion, youth empowerment



Prof Saiful Islam, vice-chancellor of American International University-Bangladesh, and M Nazem A Choudhury, deputy managing director of Prime Bank PLC, pose for group photographs at the seminar, titled "Financial Inclusion: Engaging & Inspiring Youth in Banking", on the university campus in Dhaka yesterday. PHOTO: PRIME BANK

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Prime Bank PLC, in collaboration with American International University-Bangladesh (AIUB) and its AIUB Business Club, organised a seminar, titled "Financial Inclusion: Engaging & Inspiring Youth in Banking", at the university campus in Dhaka yesterday.

The programme, conducted under the banner of PrimeAcademia – a flagship campus initiative of Prime Bank – is designed as a one-stop banking service platform tailored to the needs of academic institutions and their stakeholders across Bangladesh, according to a press release.

The seminar drew participation from more than 200 students representing a wide range of disciplines. It served as a dynamic forum to foster financial literacy, encourage responsible money

management, and inspire career exploration within the banking and financial services sector.

Students also had the opportunity to open accounts instantly, enabling them to experience modern, customer-friendly banking services first-hand.

Beyond promoting awareness of financial inclusion, the initiative sought to equip young participants with the knowledge and skills essential for employability, entrepreneurship, and leadership in a rapidly evolving economy.

The event further emphasised the importance of industry-academia collaboration. Both Prime Bank and AIUB expressed strong interest in strengthening their partnership through student-focused initiatives, collaborative research, and skill development programmes in the years ahead.

Bank Asia recognises top performers of 'Silver Jubilee Sales Campaign'

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Bank Asia PLC has recognised its employees for their exceptional performance in the "Silver Jubilee Sales Campaign" at an award-giving ceremony recently held at Bank Asia Tower in the capital's Karwan Bazar.

ANM Mahfuz, Additional Managing Director of Bank Asia PLC, presented the awards as the chief guest and encouraged the recipients to continue driving the bank's success in the future, according to a press release.

The "Silver Jubilee Sales Campaign"

was launched to strengthen retail CASA deposits, attract new retail customers, and accelerate credit card sales and activations.

A total of 30 branch-level employees were honoured with crests, certificates, and cash incentives in recognition of their outstanding contributions and active engagement.

Muhammad Mustafa Haikal Hashmi, SM Anisuzzaman and Syed Zulkar Nayen, deputy managing directors of the bank, along with other senior executives and officials, were also present.



ANM Mahfuz, additional managing director of Bank Asia PLC, poses for photographs with the award recipients of the "Silver Jubilee Sales Campaign" at Bank Asia Tower in the capital's Karwan Bazar recently. PHOTO: BANK ASIA



Md Abdul Latif, deputy managing director of Citizens Bank PLC, poses for group photographs with participants of a training programme on "Operations Guidelines on BACH & BEFTN" at its training academy in Dhaka recently. Mohammad Shafiqul Imdad, additional director of the Payment Systems Department at the Bangladesh Bank, conducted the event. PHOTO: CITIZENS BANK

Corporate earnings likely to rebound

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stable taka, while lower government securities yields signal easing interest rates. Positive current account and balance of payments positions further reinforce this stability, boosting overall investor confidence, it added.

"The outlook for the equity market is equally encouraging."

The report projects that the DSEX holds up to 85 percent upside potential, drawing parallels with recent sharp rallies in markets like Pakistan

and Sri Lanka, where indices surged more than 150 percent after similar macroeconomic

turnarounds.

Pakistan's Karachi All Share Index soared 214 percent in two years while inflation dropped, and Sri Lanka witnessed a 162 percent market return in the same period, it pointed out.

CAL Bangladesh projects the next two years as a pivotal period for the nation's capital markets, with the potential to attract both domestic and foreign investment at unprecedented levels.

It said the confluence of macroeconomic stability, strong corporate performance, and renewed investor confidence could propel the DSE into its most dynamic growth

phase to date.

The market went on a bull run following the national polls in 2008 after two years of interim government tenure. With elections likely to be held in early 2026, post-election political clarity will boost investor confidence.

"Current low valuations offer an opportunity to lock in elevated dividend yields," it said, adding that major listed consumer companies are trading at attractive valuations.

The financial intermediary forecasts that the exchange rate might remain within Tk 122-125 per dollar by next December, as both

the current account and balance of payments are expected to turn positive.

It expects inflation to fall to 6.5-7.5 percent by next December, driven by tight monetary policy and a high 2024 base. Inflation is therefore expected to hit a three-year low.

Interest rates will fall to single digits due to weak credit demand and strong real returns attracting inflows.

CAL Bangladesh, however, said political unrest, international conflict, and a possible recession from tariffs could affect major trading partners and the global economy.

Logistics costs eat up 16% of GDP

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Yousuf said the draft policy identifies 62 coordination challenges across multiple agencies and sets out an action plan involving ministries, regulators and the private sector.

"We must boost logistics efficiency if we want serious foreign investment," he said, adding that Bangladesh's \$3 billion FDI inflow in 2023 was far behind India's \$250 billion and Vietnam's \$18 billion.

The senior secretary said the Chattogram port, which handles more than 90 percent of container traffic, was already operating beyond capacity.

Expansion is under way but moving slowly, he acknowledged. "The long-awaited Bay Terminal

project has gained traction, with the World Bank set to finance the breakthrough. Tenders are expected within two months."

PSA Singapore, DP World of Dubai, and Saudi firm Red Sea Gateway Terminal have been shortlisted under a public-private partnership (PPP) model.

He also highlighted progress in port digitalisation, including e-document submission and an e-auction system for clearing abandoned containers.

Yousuf said there was a shortage of locomotives on the Dhaka-Chattogram rail route and suggested private operators might be allowed to carry freight there.

He added that a revised

tariff structure and a new licensing system for shipping agents were in the works, though legal obstacles remained.

A national logistics coordination meeting will take place in Chattogram later this month, alongside the release of a six-month performance review.

At the programme, top business leaders voiced concerns about persistent logistics challenges.

Mohammad Hatem, president of the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA), warned that without urgent upgrades, the country's \$100 billion export target would remain out of reach.

He cited delays, mismanagement and rising demurrage charges, saying

containers were often held for days and illegal payments demanded.

The BKMEA president criticised the Chattogram Port Authority for raising service charges by 40 percent recently without consulting stakeholders.

He urged the government to bring in foreign experts, complete stalled projects such as the Pangoon terminal and expressways linking Gazipur, Ashulia and Narayanganj, and reform customs, banking and utility services.

Azam J Chowdhury, president of the Bangladesh Ocean Going Ship Owners' Association, criticised the government for neglecting the private maritime sector. "We operate 100 percent of the industry, yet

we are ignored."

Chowdhury called for a taskforce to tackle legal and bureaucratic hurdles, pointing to flaws in the 2020 coastal shipping ordinance, inconsistent customs practices and rising licensing costs.

He also warned that Bangladesh risked non-compliance with the International Maritime Organization's green fuel mandate by 2028.

M Masrur Reaz, chairman of Policy Exchange Bangladesh, urged the rapid implementation of more than 60 national logistics policy action points, including a multimodal logistics master plan and PPP-led port and rail projects.

He argued for lifting

foreign ownership caps in logistics and shifting implementation leadership to the shipping ministry.

"Logistics is no longer just infrastructure; it is an economic imperative," said the economist.

Prof Md Mamun Habib of Independent University, Bangladesh, delivered the keynote address.

Syed Ershad Ahmed, president of the American Chamber of Commerce in Bangladesh; Shamsuddin Chowdhury and Harun or Rashid, general secretary and member of the Bangladesh Container Shipping Association; Mohammad Sazzad Hossain, director of the Bangladesh Bank; and Shamsul Huq Zahid, editor of The Financial Express, spoke among others.

Import containers must move

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Currently, 65 categories of imported goods are permitted for unstuffing and delivery through 19 private ICDs. More than 30 percent of import containers arriving at the port are transferred to these depots for delivery to consignees.

The circular noted that business bodies, industrial units, and stakeholders have recently complained of procedural complexities, delays, and inadequate off-dock capacity in handling import consignments.

Several ICD operators, however, argued that the congestion which plagued

the depots last month has eased considerably in recent weeks.

They attributed existing delays in bringing ICD-bound import containers mainly to acute congestion at the port yards.

"If the port authority could allocate designated space for ICD-bound containers within the port, it would greatly facilitate quicker transfers," said a senior executive of an ICD, requesting anonymity.

He further observed that the prevailing practice of transferring containers from the ship's hook point remains time-consuming.