

Starlink establishes four local gateways

MAHMUDUL HASAN

Starlink Services Bangladesh Ltd has finally completed the installation of four local gateways across the country, as Elon Musk's satellite internet company looks to solidify its footprint in Bangladesh.

Two gateways were established in a hi-tech park in Gazipur, while the other two were set up in Rajshahi and Jashore, according to recent inspections by the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC).

The BTRC could not verify whether the systems were fully functional since no Starlink representatives were present during the inspection of those sites, according to documents seen by The Daily Star.

However, local partner companies informed the regulator that commercial traffic had already begun flowing through the Kaliakair gateways from August 9 and the Jashore and Rajshahi gateways from August 20.

Starlink couldn't be reached for a comment regarding the matter.

THE INSPECTIONS

Starlink typically establishes local gateways to connect its satellite network with a country's internet infrastructure, ensuring faster speeds, lower latency, regulatory compliance, and integration with national security and telecom requirements.

The establishment of the four gateways came after the BTRC granted an extraordinary three-month waiver allowing Starlink to begin operations without a gateway, which is mandatory under the guidelines.

Starlink was awarded its operating licence on April 29 this year, and subsequently received permission for test operations on May 8, which expired on August 7.

Under the licensing guidelines, the company is obligated to establish at least one gateway system within Bangladesh before commencing its service.

According to BTRC documents, on August 10, Starlink informed the regulator via email that four gateways had been installed, but no official letter was

GATEWAY INSTALLATIONS

Starlink set up four gateways in Gazipur, Rajshahi, and Jashore

PARTNERSHIPS & INFRASTRUCTURE


Bondstein Tech operates Rajshahi gateway, while FIDC manages Jashore and Kaliakair

Summit Communications and Fiber@Home are supplying high-capacity fibre connectivity for sites

RESELLER AGREEMENTS

Robi became first telecom operator to act as an authorised Starlink enterprise reseller

BSCL signed a \$2.5m deal to resell Starlink hardware and services



Resellers get discounts, portal, and API access

BUSINESS MODEL & CUSTOMERS

Target clients: banks, hospitals, aviation, energy

submitted to the commission. Following this, the BTRC issued inspection orders on August 13 and August 16, dispatching teams to verify the infrastructure.

The BTRC's inspection team found that large antenna structures and other necessary equipment had been installed at the hi-tech city in Kaliakair of Gazipur, according to regulatory documents. The gateways are managed by Felicity IDC Limited (FIDC), a local TIER-III certified data centre, which is also providing essential infrastructure support.

Another gateway has been built in Rajshahi, which is being managed

by the local technology company Bondstein Technologies, while Summit Communications has connected the site to Kaliakair through high-capacity fibre links.

In Jashore, a gateway with multiple antennas has also been constructed, while work is still ongoing at another section of the site. FIDC is also managing this gateway.

Fiber@Home is supplying additional large-scale connectivity for both the Jashore and Kaliakair gateways.

LOCAL COLLABORATION

Starlink is working closely with several Bangladeshi companies to run its

operations on the ground.

Meanwhile, Starlink has signed deals with Robi Axiata PLC and Bangladesh Satellite Company Limited (BSCL), making them its authorised resellers.

Under the agreement with Starlink, Robi will market two service tiers, Local Priority and Global Priority, covering both fixed and portable use cases.

The telecom operator plans to distribute Starlink services through its enterprise channels, retail outlets, and community Wi-Fi models to extend access to rural and underserved areas, said Shahed Alam, chief corporate and regulatory affairs officer at Robi.

He said the initiative will support critical applications like e-learning, video conferencing, and digital commerce.

Earlier, BSCL signed a \$2.5 million deal to procure and resell Starlink hardware and data packages to enterprises, diversifying its portfolio beyond Bangabandhu-1, according to Shah Ahmedul Kabir, general manager (sales and marketing) at BSCL.

As part of the Starlink reseller framework, Starlink Bangladesh will import the terminals and sell them to local resellers, including BSCL, in Bangladeshi currency.

Resellers will receive a 15 percent discount on hardware and 5 percent off the service charges. They will also gain access to Starlink's reseller portal and Application Programming Interface (API) for managing clients and services.

Resellers are free to set their own pricing, directly bill customers, and offer value-added services such as installation and technical support.

Potential customers include banks, hospitals, factories, data centres, offshore installations, and sectors such as aviation, maritime, energy, construction, and media.

Globally, Starlink markets primarily to individual users through its Residential and Roam packages. For corporate and government clients, it relies on resellers under its Business and Priority plans. In Bangladesh, BSCL and other local agents will be able to serve both enterprise and residential markets, though individuals can still buy directly through Starlink's website.

Bankers: the misunderstood professionals

DI CHOUDHURY

Bankers today are often viewed through a narrow lens as profiteering professionals. With each bank failure or financial crisis, the finger is pointed at them. Much of this misunderstanding is caused by limited public awareness of how banks and bankers actually function in a complex modern economy. The purpose here is not to prove a case but to place matters in perspective.

When I began my banking career in the 1960s, the role of a banker was not so complicated. Over the last few decades, the innovation of financial products, combined with pressure to extend services to the unbanked, has enlarged both the scope and the complexities of bankers' work.

This crucial role was recognised again in 2022 when the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences was awarded to Ben Bernanke, Douglas Diamond and Philip Dybvig. Their work offered theoretical and empirical insights into how banks operate and why they are vulnerable to runs and crises. All three laureates have been professors at renowned American universities. Bernanke also served as chair of the US Federal Reserve from 2006 to 2014.

Diamond and Dybvig showed that banks are not mere middlemen. They bridge the gap between savers and borrowers, a process called financial intermediation. They also perform the vital task of maturity transformation, converting short-term deposits into long-term loans. Another key function of modern bankers is fractional reserve banking, through which they create new deposits, also called derivative deposits.

Bernanke showed that banks are inherently fragile. Runs do not always occur from internal failures, but also from external factors. Structural weaknesses in financial systems, macroeconomic shocks or policy mistakes often play a part.

The recent banking crisis in Bangladesh illustrates how some innocent bankers become scapegoats in troubled times. In several cases, bank owners, aided by cronies, looted the institutions under their control. Justice requires a clear distinction between such swindlers and the wider community of professional bankers. The misdeeds of a few must not overshadow the role that ethical and skilled bankers play in supporting stability and national development.

In this context, many point to Bangladesh's recent mega projects. Without a professional banking framework, such projects would never have taken shape. These projects are built by overseas contractors who require the government's assurance of financial integrity. Verification goes through a banking process. International banks issue guarantees on behalf of the contractors, while local banks take on commercial risks with those banks and issue counter guarantees to local agencies. All this happens under established international protocols, implemented by local bankers.

The Nobel laureates also demonstrated with evidence how, during the Great Depression of the 1930s and the global financial crisis of 2007-08, financial intermediation collapsed, and how banking capability restored stability.

The general public can only perceive what they see at the two ends of intermediation: receiving money from savers and lending to borrowers. They rarely glimpse the processes behind the scenes. The intermediation skill of bankers is a lifelong craft, refined through experience rather than gained from a business school certificate. Like a mason laying brick upon brick to build a castle, bankers connect transaction after transaction to construct the complex architecture of finance. And much like a castle's polished façade hides the sweat and labour behind its walls, the outward appearance of banking rarely reflects the depth of bankers' toil that sustains it.

The writer is a former banker

Rules eased for faster release of bonded goods

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The National Board of Revenue (NBR) has eased rules for faster clearance of industrial raw materials and other items imported duty-free under bonded warehouse licences.

In a press statement issued yesterday, the revenue board said its field offices dealing with bonded warehouse-related issues will allow the release of goods from bonded warehouses even if there are discrepancies in the declaration of goods and the Harmonised System (HS) Code, a globally standardised numerical system for classifying traded products.

The move comes as mismatches between HS codes or descriptions in bond licences, utilisation declarations (UDs) or import declarations of goods to be used for making export products often delay customs clearance.

Such delays hinder the timely shipment of export consignments, creating bottlenecks in meeting export orders.

Under the new guidelines, if customs authorities determine a different HS code or description during physical examination, but the first four digits of the code match those mentioned in the bonded warehouse-related documents, the goods may be released promptly.

This will, however, require the bonded warehouse licence holder to submit an undertaking to update the HS code or product description to the respective field office.

Furthermore, if customs determine a completely different HS code, goods can still be released within two days by updating the code in the Customs Bond Management System (CBMS).

Lenders asked to file annual CSR budget by Feb

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Bangladesh Bank has directed all scheduled banks and non-bank financial institutions (NBFIs) to submit their annual corporate social responsibility (CSR) budgets, along with related documents, by February each year.

In a circular issued on September 7, the central bank said the move is aimed at monitoring CSR activities and ensuring proper utilisation of funds in line with sector-wise expenditure requirements.

Banks and NBFIs must provide information on their net profit after tax for the previous year based on December accounts, along with a copy of the CSR budget approved by their boards, including the board memo.

If the budget is revised later, an updated version must be submitted with the six-monthly report.

The directive takes immediate effect, the banking regulator said in the circular.

Wealthy apparel shoppers in US shrug off tariffs

REUTERS, New York

A handful of apparel retailers, including Levi Strauss, are teasing more full-priced products, testing how much wealthier shoppers are willing to pay despite the sobering effect of tariffs.

They have not been disappointed so far. Levi's raised prices on some products in July but saw no slowdown in demand, the denim maker's chief financial officer, Harmit Singh, said at the Goldman Sachs Global Retailing Conference in New York on Wednesday.

"We are making a full court press in selling higher full-price sales than we have done in the past," he said. "The Levi's consumer largely

earns \$100,000 and over. And that consumer we are seeing is generally resilient." Ralph Lauren, Under Armour and Abercrombie & Fitch are also leaning into a more full-price strategy, they said, in recent earnings disclosures.

While lower-income households are as US President Donald Trump's trade war has forced companies, wealthier consumers are buying steadily, largely unaffected by the cooling labor market.

Stock market gains and low credit card debt have bolstered the . According to Moody's Analytics, the richest 10 percent of Americans - those earning at least \$250,000 a year - now account for

half of all consumer spending.

"We've been shifting our business towards a more elevated full-price consumer base, and this has served us well as our core consumer around the world remains resilient," Ralph Lauren CEO Patrice Louvet said in early August.

Under Armour's CEO Kevin Plank said in August the company was considering bumping up prices for the "embedded consumer who we do have pricing power with," referring to loyal customers. "We're seeing success testing new key items at full price, including our \$45 Self-form hat and our heat gear collection are both strong examples."

And if that strategy doesn't work, better consumer-tracking technology now allows retailers to pivot quickly and offer targeted promotions, helping them generate higher profit margins, said Kate McShane, managing director at Goldman Sachs.



Trump-China deal rests on the art of the possible

REUTERS, Hong Kong

For Donald Trump, the next big China deal is all about the last big China deal. The president's first trade pact with Beijing, signed in 2019, did little to change Beijing's behaviour or jump-start American manufacturing. Yet the White House is once again pushing for high-stakes negotiations, even if any agreement could prove as ephemeral as the last.

At first glance, a thaw in relations between the US and China seems a long shot. Trump's unhappiness about Beijing's unkept promises from his first term helps explain the president's intense aggression towards the top US trading partner since returning to the White House. While US tariffs on Chinese goods have fallen from triple-digit levels touched in April, they still stand at 46 percent, per HSBC.

Yet the Trump administration's policy remains unpredictable. Many in Washington agree that, beyond tariffs, foreign policy towards China is almost non-existent as hawks and doves both vie for the president's ear, while lesser officials dare not make any moves that might contradict him. As one senior think tank puts it, the State Department no longer has a real China desk because "Trump is his own China desk officer".

But with virtually all \$580 billion in bilateral trade between the two countries subject to levies, per the Peterson Institute for International Economics, and polls showing public approval of Trump's economic performance near a record low, the president appears to want a deal with

his counterpart Xi Jinping. People familiar with the situation say the White House has in recent months contacted chief executives at big American companies to gauge their interest in joining a delegation to Beijing later this year.

Policy-makers and think tankers in

Washington DC agree the most likely scenario for a meeting with Xi would involve Trump making a trip to Beijing on either side of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum's leadership summit, slated to gather in South Korea in late October.

However, Xi first needs to commit to a meeting. For China's risk-averse top cadres, face-to-face negotiations between heads of state are typically conducted only after an agreement's central tenets are ironed out. Any trip by Trump, then, would be preceded by a visit from a senior administration official like Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent or Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick.

Beijing appears willing to wait while the economic harm to the US from tariffs mounts. Trump's decision to extend a three-month delay to punitive levies on Chinese imports on August 12 underscored their impact on the American economy.

Chinese leaders, faced with their own difficulties in hitting official growth targets, have good reason to want lower tariffs. Hence the visit to Washington at the end of August by trade representative Li Chenggang, who according to China's commerce ministry met with counterparts from Treasury, Commerce and the Office of the US Trade Representative.



US President Donald Trump speaks to journalists at the White House in Washington, DC. Trump's decision to extend a three-month delay to punitive levies on Chinese imports on August 12 underscored their impact on the American economy. PHOTO: AFP/FILE