

# Star BUSINESS



## Govt abruptly dissolves NBR reform committee

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The interim government has "abruptly" dissolved a five-member advisory committee formed to initiate reforms for the National Board of Revenue (NBR), even though a comprehensive report on the committee's recommendations is pending.

On Sunday, the finance ministry issued a notification in this regard.

"The NBR Advisory Committee, formed on October 9 last year, has been dissolved following the promulgation of the Revenue Policy and Management Ordinance 2025, which separates revenue policy from management," it said.

The committee members expressed surprise at the move, saying their work was not yet complete. They claimed they were still preparing a comprehensive report to submit to the government.

"We don't know why the government has taken this step so suddenly. We are still working to fulfil our six-point terms of reference," said Muhammad Abdul Mazid, one of the committee members.

Mazid said they had completed only one-fifth of their assigned responsibilities.

"We have just submitted a single report on the separation. For the NBR reform, this is not enough. We are still conducting consultation meetings with various stakeholders," he said.

The committee's six-point mandate included advising on fiscal and revenue reforms, assessing the NBR's capacity, recommending modernisation, guiding institutional integrity and governance, supporting citizen engagement, and offering other revenue-related policy advice.

The committee, formed on October 9 last year, included two former NBR chairmen—Muhammad Abdul Mazid and Nasiruddin Ahmed.

The other members were Delwar Hossain, Aminur Rahman, and Farid Uddin, all former members of the taxes and customs divisions. **READ MORE ON B3**

# NBR expands duty-free import benefits to diversify exports

Manufacturers see huge opportunity

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

In a move to facilitate export diversification, the National Board of Revenue (NBR) has opened the door for partial exporters in eight sectors to import raw materials duty-free against a bank guarantee.

In a notification last week, the revenue authority said the facility would cover processed foods, light engineering, furniture, electronics, plastic products and leather goods.

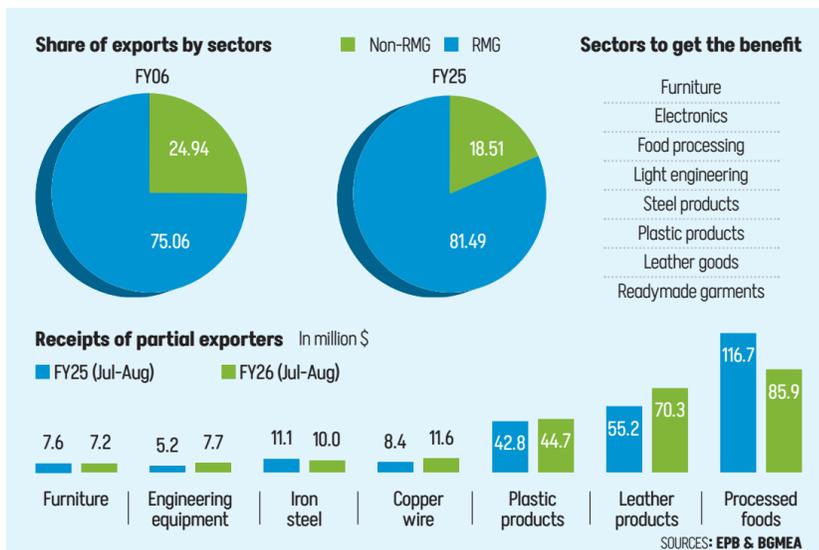
Yesterday, the revenue board said that many exporters cannot avail a bonded warehouse licence under existing rules, which limits their ability to import duty-free raw materials for export production.

They can now bring in raw materials without paying import duties upfront by providing a bank guarantee equal to the customs duty assessed on the products.

The refund of duties after export, which previously frustrated businesses with long delays, will no longer be required.

The change comes as ready-made garments have been dominating the country's export basket for more than three decades, according to the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

Since fiscal year 2013-14, garments have



accounted for more than 80 percent of export earnings, even though the government launched a Tk 941 crore project in 2017 to improve competitiveness in leather, footwear, light engineering and plastics.

The project cost has since risen to Tk 1,264 crore, according to documents from the planning ministry.

Exporters outside the garment sector had been pressing for easier rules, including access to bonded warehouse facilities, to increase their overseas sales. **READ MORE ON B3**

## Govt to conduct feasibility study for FTA with EU

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

The government will begin a feasibility study soon to identify priority areas for negotiations on a free trade agreement (FTA) with the European Union (EU).

The move aims to protect preferential trade benefits after the country graduates from the group of least developed countries (LDCs) to developing nation status in November next year.

On signing the trade deal with the EU, Commerce Secretary Mahbubur Rahman said the ministry will hold an inter-ministerial meeting next month to take a formal opinion from other ministries, departments and agencies of the government.

"A meeting planned for today [yesterday] to discuss the feasibility had been deferred due to other commitments and rescheduled for next month," Rahman told The Daily Star yesterday.

**Focus now shifts to free trade deal as stringent terms make achieving GSP Plus difficult**

The EU is Bangladesh's largest export market, taking more than \$25 billion worth of goods each year, or over 60 percent of the country's total shipments.

At present, Bangladesh enjoys duty-free access to the EU. The EU has already granted the country a three-year extension of zero-duty facilities until 2029.

After that, exporters will face tariffs of about 12 percent without an agreement. The country's major export competitors, such as India and Vietnam, have already signed FTAs with the bloc.

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Parallel to the FTA, Bangladesh is also negotiating with the EU for GSP Plus trade benefits, which would allow duty-free access even after the LDC graduation.

The Generalized Scheme of Preferences Plus, or GSP Plus, is a special EU incentive arrangement that grants duty-free access for vulnerable developing countries to the European market.

To qualify, however, countries must ratify 32 international conventions. Four of these, covering good governance, human rights, labour rights and environmental protection, are considered core and have strict conditions.

Rahman said Bangladesh has already signed most of the conventions, but four to five conventions are difficult for Bangladesh to ratify because of having many stringent conditions. **READ MORE ON B3**

## India to launch EFTA trade pact on Oct 1

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

In the midst of a tariff battle with the United States, India will formally operationalise its free trade agreement (FTA) with four countries of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) bloc on October 1.

This will be India's first-ever trade pact with a European grouping, the country's Commerce and Industry Minister, Piyush Goyal, said yesterday.

The FTA with the EFTA countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland), which was finalised in March last year, will come into effect from Wednesday, said Indian Union Minister of Commerce and Industry, Shri Piyush Goyal, while addressing the valedictory session of the UP International Trade Show.

He said developed nations are keen to sign FTAs with India, which has already concluded such agreements with the UAE, Australia, and the UK.

India's foreign exchange reserves have reached \$700 billion, he pointed out.

India is also in discussions with the US, EU, New Zealand, Oman, Peru, and Chile, while Qatar and Bahrain have also expressed interest in trade deals, Goyal said, adding that the terms of reference with Eurasia have been finalised.

The minister said India has transformed from a "fragile" economy in 2014 to become the world's fourth-largest economy today and claimed it will become the third-largest economy with a \$5 trillion size in the next two years. **READ MORE ON B3**

# Post-harvest losses eat up 21m tonnes of food a year: CPD



**Though Bangladesh has made remarkable strides in food production, it is failing to protect that progress because of staggering post-harvest losses.**

PHOTO: STAR/FILE

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh may have achieved self-sufficiency in food production but annually suffers post-harvest losses of nearly 21 million tonnes, which experts warn are eroding food security, undermining farmers' livelihoods, and costing the economy billions.

To give some perspective, annual average per capita rice consumption is around 118 kilogrammes, as per a 2022 survey of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

The concern was raised at a policy dialogue jointly organised by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), the Embassy of Denmark, and the World Food Programme (WFP) at Pan Pacific Sonargaon Dhaka yesterday.

Farida Akhter, adviser to the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock, said while Bangladesh had made remarkable strides in food production, it was still failing to protect that progress because of staggering post-harvest losses.

"We are discussing a very important issue—moving towards zero food loss and waste. Although we may not reach that goal by 2030, I believe we can make meaningful progress," she said.

Akhter urged policymakers to prioritise investment in storage facilities, fair pricing mechanisms, and behavioural change, stressing that without systemic action, the problem would persist.

Citing World Bank and WFP estimates, she pointed

out that 15.5 million to 16 million people in Bangladesh suffer from food insecurity, a situation projected to continue into 2025 despite production gains.

She emphasised the stark inequality in food consumption. "Some segments of society overconsume while others struggle to meet basic needs. This imbalance intensifies waste and weakens overall food security," she said.

Akhter drew attention to significant losses in agriculture, fisheries, and livestock due to inadequate storage facilities, weak infrastructure, and lack of a fair price support system for farmers.

"Food is perishable and cannot be treated like industrial goods," she cautioned. "Until we address waste and inequality, hunger will persist, and sovereignty will remain out of reach."

Echoing her concerns, Anders Karlson, chargé d'affaires of the Embassy of Denmark, said food loss and waste represented a global challenge and translated into "simple economic losses."

He noted that food is frequently lost during transportation, at the farm gate, and increasingly because of extreme weather events triggered by the climate crisis. **READ MORE ON B3**

# Mastercard launches co-branded debit card with Islami Bank

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Mastercard, in collaboration with Islami Bank Bangladesh PLC, yesterday launched a co-branded debit card for students and doctors of Rajshahi Medical College.

Prof Kh Md Faisal Alam, principal of Rajshahi Medical College, attended the launch of the card, according to a press release.

The card offers convenient and secure digital payment solutions, featuring dual-currency, contactless functionality for seamless local and international transactions.

Cardholders will also enjoy dining and lifestyle benefits, including discounts at over 9,500 Mastercard partner merchants across the country.

Rathin Kumar Paul, director of Bangladesh Bank Rajshahi Office; Md Sharafat Ullah Khan, director of the Payment Systems Department (PSD) at Bangladesh Bank; Rafeza Akhter Kanta, director of the PSD; Syed Mohammad Kamal, country manager for Bangladesh at Mastercard; and Mohammad Jamal Uddin Mazumder, additional managing director of Islami Bank Bangladesh PLC, were also present, along with senior officials from the participating organisations.



Prof Kh Md Faisal Alam, principal of Rajshahi Medical College; Syed Mohammad Kamal, country manager for Bangladesh at Mastercard; and Mohammad Jamal Uddin Mazumder, additional managing director of Islami Bank Bangladesh PLC, attend the launch of the co-branded debit card yesterday.

PHOTO: MASTERCARD

# Prime Bank holds anti-money laundering training in Jashore



Md Ziaur Rahman, deputy managing director and chief anti-money laundering compliance officer (CAMLCO) of Prime Bank PLC, poses for group photograph with participants of the training programme in Jashore recently.

PHOTO: PRIME BANK

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Prime Bank PLC has organised a daylong training programme on Anti-Money Laundering (AML) and Combating the Financing of Terrorism (CFT) compliance in Jashore recently.

A total of 131 participants, including all branch heads and branch anti-money laundering compliance officers (BAMLCOs) from 16 branches and sub-branches under the southern region, took part in the training.

Md Ziaur Rahman, deputy managing director and chief anti-money laundering compliance officer (CAMLCO) of Prime Bank PLC, presided over the programme and delivered an address underscoring the importance of robust compliance practices, according to a press release.

Ibna Ahsan Kabir, joint director of the Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit, attended the event as the resource person and shared his expertise on the subject.

The initiative reflects Prime Bank's continued commitment to strengthening its compliance culture and aligning with national and international standards to ensure a secure and resilient financial ecosystem, the release added.

Mostafa Mahmud, head of the southern region, along with other senior officials, was also present.

# Uttara Bank organises business development conference

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Uttara Bank PLC has organised a programme, titled "Business Development Conference-2025", at the Radisson Blu Water Garden Hotel in Dhaka recently.

Azharul Islam, chairman of Uttara Bank PLC, inaugurated the programme as chief guest, according to a press release.

Md Abul Hashem, managing director and chief executive officer of the bank, presided over the conference.

Badrnunessa Sharmin Islam, director of the bank; Maksudul Hasan, additional managing director; Md Rezaul Karim and Khandaker Ali Samnoon, deputy managing directors; along with all executives and branch incumbents, were also present.



Azharul Islam, chairman of Uttara Bank PLC, inaugurates "Business Development Conference-2025" at Radisson Blu Water Garden Hotel in Dhaka recently.

PHOTO: UTTARA BANK

# Mutual Trust Bank unveils annual sustainability report



Syed Mahbubur Rahman, managing director and CEO of Mutual Trust Bank PLC, attends the release of the bank's 11th Annual Sustainability Report for 2024 at the bank's head office in Dhaka recently.

PHOTO: MUTUAL TRUST BANK

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Mutual Trust Bank PLC (MTB) has unveiled its 11th Annual Sustainability Report for 2024, prepared in line with the standards of the

Global Reporting Initiative (GRI).

Released under the tagline "Our Sustainability Journey is defined by action," the report highlights MTB's efforts in green financing, environmental stewardship,

governance, and social responsibility, underscoring the bank's commitment to creating long-term value for stakeholders.

During the launch, Syed Mahbubur Rahman, managing director and CEO of Mutual Trust Bank PLC, said, "Sustainability is at the heart of everything we do. This report reflects our dedication to transparency, accountability, and lasting impact for all our stakeholders."

Since 2014, the bank has consistently adhered to GRI guidelines, establishing itself as a pioneer in transparent and comprehensive ESG reporting in Bangladesh's banking sector.

Chowdhury Akhtar Asif, additional managing director and group chief risk officer, noted, "By aligning with international standards like GRI, we ensure our ESG initiatives are measurable, credible, and set benchmarks for the industry."

Md Khalid Mahmood Khan, additional managing director and chief business officer, along with the deputy managing directors and the heads of infrastructure and sustainability divisions, was also present.

# China's new K visa beckons

FROM PAGE B4

There are also no details on financial incentives, employment facilitation, permanent residency, or family sponsorship. Unlike the US, China does not offer citizenship to foreigners except in rare cases.

China's State Council did not respond to a request for comment asking for more details on the logistics and underlying strategy of the K visa.

Language is another barrier: most Chinese tech firms operate in Mandarin, limiting opportunities for non-Chinese speakers.

Political tensions between Delhi and Beijing could also

become a factor that could limit the number of Indian K visa applicants China is willing to accept, experts said.

"China will need to ensure Indian citizens feel welcome and can do meaningful work without Mandarin," said Feller.

China's talent recruitment has traditionally focused on China-born scientists abroad and overseas Chinese.

Recent efforts include home-purchase subsidies and signing bonuses of up to 5 million yuan (\$702,200). These have drawn back US-based Chinese STEM talent, especially amid Washington's growing scrutiny

on ties to China.

"The recruitment effort targeting Indian tech talent in China is growing but remains moderate compared to the more intensive, well-established, and well-funded initiatives aimed at repatriating Chinese STEM talent," said Sichuan University's Das.

A Chinese STEM graduate who recently got a job offer from a Silicon Valley-based tech company was also sceptical about the K visa's prospects.

"Asian countries like China don't rely on immigration and local Chinese governments have many ways to attract

domestic talent," he said, declining to be named for privacy reasons.

The US has over 51 million immigrants — 15 percent of its population — compared to just 1 million foreigners in China, less than 1 percent of its population.

While China is unlikely to significantly alter its immigration policy to allow in millions of foreign workers, analysts say the K visa could still boost Beijing's fortunes in its geopolitical rivalry with Washington.

"If China can attract even a sliver of global tech talent, it will be more competitive in cutting-edge technology," Feller said.

# Foreign investment in Thailand surges 125% in Jan-Aug

ANN/THE NATION

Thailand has recorded a massive surge in foreign direct investment during the first eight months of 2025, driven primarily by companies from Japan, the United States, and Singapore.

A total of 687 foreign investors were granted permission to operate in the kingdom between January and August, representing a total investment value of over 225.5 billion baht.

Auramon Supthaweehum, director general of the Department of Business Development (DBD) at the Ministry of Commerce, confirmed that the total investment value had soared by 125 percent compared to the same period in 2024.

Furthermore, the number of foreign firms authorised to invest increased by 28 percent.

THE TOP FIVE NATIONALITIES

The investment was channelled through 181 foreign business licence applications and 506 requests for foreign business certificates.

The top five investing nations by number of companies are:

Japan (125 companies): Japan accounted for the largest portion of capital, investing 71.8 billion baht. Investment was concentrated in international trade (sourcing for manufacturing), software development services, and contract manufacturing for goods, including machinery and components for agricultural tractors and motorhomes.

## A total of 687 foreign investors were granted permission to operate in the kingdom between January and August

Singapore (93 companies): Investors from Singapore committed 68.5 billion baht. Key sectors included Data Centre services, electronic financial and payment systems, and brokerage/agency services for trading Digital Tokens (specifically those issued by the Ministry of Finance).

United States (105 companies): US investment reached 3.4 billion baht, focusing on brokerage for hotel bookings and tourism, advertising, business management consulting, and contract manufacturing for specialised electronic vehicle parts.

China (87 companies): Chinese investors committed 20.8 billion baht. Notable projects include raw material procurement, repair and maintenance services for electric vehicles (EVs), and contract manufacturing for automated machinery and EV motors.

Hong Kong (74 companies): Hong Kong invested 12.4 billion baht, focusing on high-value services such as petroleum drilling in the Gulf of Thailand, metal cutting services, and non-network-owning telecommunications services.

Auramon emphasised that this wave of foreign business activity is crucial for the transfer of specialised technology and know-how to the Thai workforce.

Specific examples cited include expertise in petroleum drilling, maintenance of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) receiving stations, EV component manufacturing processes, and advanced warehouse management.



Kimiwa Saddat, managing director (current charge) of Community Bank Bangladesh PLC, and Muhammad Nazmul Haque, director of the Credit Guarantee Department (CGD) of Bangladesh Bank, pose for photograph after signing the agreement at the BB headquarters in Motijheel, Dhaka yesterday.

PHOTO: COMMUNITY BANK BANGLADESH

# Community Bank signs deal with BB for loans to small savers

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Community Bank Bangladesh PLC has signed a participatory agreement with Bangladesh Bank (BB) under the Financial Inclusion Credit Guarantee Scheme (FICGS).

Muhammad Nazmul Haque, director of the Credit Guarantee Department (CGD) of Bangladesh Bank, and Kimiwa Saddat, managing director (current charge) of Community Bank Bangladesh PLC, signed the agreement at the BB headquarters in Motijheel, Dhaka yesterday, according to a press release.

Md Sawkatul Alam, executive director of the central bank, attended the programme.

The agreement is a key initiative aimed at extending credit facilities to Tk 10/50/100 account holders, marginal

and landless farmers, low-income professionals, school banking account holders, and small business owners, who often face difficulties in accessing formal financing due to inadequate collateral.

The FICGS seeks to promote inclusive financing by providing credit guarantees against eligible loans, thereby reducing the risk exposure of participating banks and financial institutions.

Mohammad Imam Hossain, additional director of the BB; Zobaida Afroze, additional director of the CGD; Md Ariful Islam, head of corporate banking and head of business (branch) of Community Bank Bangladesh PLC; Md Mamun ur Rahman, head of ADC and head of MD's coordination team; and Sharif Hasan Mamun, head of SME and agriculture, along with other senior officials of Bangladesh Bank, were also present.

## TCB to sell tea, salt, soap at subsidised rates

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The government will start selling five more items — tea, salt, detergent, and two kinds of soap — at subsidised rates through the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) from November this year.

Commerce Adviser Sk Bashir Uddin announced this at a meeting at the ministry yesterday on the listing of beneficiary families for the subsidies and the activation of relevant identification cards.

Local government representatives prepare the lists of low-income families, who are then provided identification cards by the TCB for the purchase of subsidised commodities.

Currently, the government sells three products — sugar, lentils, and soybean oil — at subsidised rates to low-income groups.

The adviser also said the government has been annually providing Tk 5,000 crore in subsidies through the sale of food items by the TCB, according to a statement from the commerce ministry yesterday.

There are 60,34,316 active family cards, and the process of activating three lakh more family cards is underway as the government targets to cater to one crore families under the TCB sales programme.

## Oil prices slip

REUTERS, Singapore

Oil prices dropped on Monday after Iraq's Kurdistan region resumed crude oil exports via Turkey over the weekend, coupled with Opec+ plans for another oil production hike in November, adding to global supplies.

Brent crude futures were down 43 cents, or 0.6 percent, at \$69.70 a barrel, as of 0630 GMT, after settling at the highest point since July 31 on Friday. US West Texas Intermediate crude was down 49 cents, or 0.8 percent, at \$65.23 a barrel, giving back most of Friday's gains.



Each bottle gourd fetches farmers here in Rajshahi's Mohonpur upazila Tk 15 to Tk 20, yet on reaching local markets from the fields through middlemen, the price goes up by at least Tk 10. On changing hands a couple of times to reach Rajshahi city, some 38 kilometres away, the vegetable turns even pricier by at least threefold. The photo was taken at Bidhirpur Haat recently.

PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

# Bangladesh's image abroad has improved: finance adviser

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh is doing well in the macroeconomic arena now, which has improved the country's image abroad, Finance Adviser Salehuddin Ahmed said yesterday.

"Though there are some challenges, at least money is not being laundered now and the foreign exchange reserve is rising," he said.

He made these comments at a seminar on financial transparency organised by the Economic Reporters Forum (ERF) in Dhaka.

He urged journalists to bring positive news to the front and, at the same time, welcomed criticism and investigative reports.

The adviser said the government cannot find all its flaws.

If journalists can show them, the government can mend them, and the same is true for the private sector, he said.

Md Sajjad Hossain Bhuiyan, chairman of the Financial Reporting Council (FRC), said the FRC was established in 2017 but has yet to become fully effective.

Efforts have been made to make the FRC

fully operational, he said, adding that the council has been entrusted with improving the quality of accounting and auditing practices in Bangladesh.

Wherever there is a flaw in the accounting system, the FRC will intervene, Bhuiyan said, noting that such interventions often make

**Many businesses avoid taxes and manipulate share prices or asset valuations by withholding their full financial picture, said FRC Chairman Md Sajjad Hossain Bhuiyan**

powerful institutions "unhappy" as they feel their personal and financial interests are threatened.

"We are working continuously to restore financial discipline in the corporate sector," he added.

He warned that many businesses avoid taxes and manipulate share prices or asset valuations

by withholding their full financial picture.

"Such practices must be curbed to ensure transparency," he said.

"If financial disclosures are complete, share prices will never skyrocket without basis or collapse unexpectedly. When there is manipulation of information, investors suffer," Bhuiyan cautioned.

He stressed the need to show the true value of assets in audit reports.

"If a bank lends Tk 90 against an asset falsely valued at Tk 100 when it is actually worth only Tk 1, how will the bank recover the loan?" he asked.

After the seminar, the finance adviser inaugurated the academic activities of the ERF Institute.

At the beginning of the seminar, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the ERF and the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Bangladesh to provide training on financial issues at the institute.

Doulot Akter Mala, president of the ERF, was present at the event.

## Gold sets fresh record, crosses Tk 195,000

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Gold prices have risen for the second time in a week, hitting an all-time high of Tk 195,383 per bhoori (11.664 grammes).

The new rate, announced by the Bangladesh Jewellers Association (Bajus), will come into effect today.

According to Bajus, the price has increased by Tk 525 per bhoori compared to the previous rate. The association said the adjustment reflects a rise in the price of pure gold in the local market.

On September 23, the price of gold reached Tk 194,858 per bhoori before falling by Tk 1,889 to Tk 192,969.

Gold prices in Bangladesh have been climbing steadily, setting new records almost every week. In September alone, the price of 22 carat gold has jumped by over Tk 16,000 per bhoori.

Industry insiders attribute the surge mainly to the international bullion market, the devaluation of the taka, economic uncertainty, and high inflation.

Although Bangladesh does not import significant volumes of gold, domestic prices remain closely aligned with global trends.

The country's annual demand for gold is estimated at 20-40 tonnes, with nearly 80 percent reportedly met through smuggling.

## Dhaka stocks edge higher

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The main index of the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) closed higher yesterday, snapping the previous day's losses, as turnover rose despite a mixed showing from large-cap sectors.

The DSEX, the benchmark index of the bourse, gained 9.7 points, or 0.18 percent, to close at 5,389.07, according to DSE data.

Other indices didn't follow the recovery of the main index as both the Shariah-based DSES and the blue-chip DS30 ended the day lower.

Turnover, a key indicator of investor activity, stood at Tk 599.33 crore, up from Tk 564.18 crore in the previous session, reflecting slightly higher investor participation in line with the market recovery.

The market closed in the green as large-cap sectors posted mixed performances, said BRAC EPL Stock Brokerage Ltd in its daily market update.

Block trades, high-volume transactions involving large numbers of securities, contributed 3.9 percent of the overall market turnover.

Market breadth was mostly positive, with 212 issues advancing against 105 declining, while 80 remained unchanged.

Among the major sectors, non bank financial institutions led the market with a 1.06 percent gain, followed by banks up 0.51 percent and telecommunications 0.08 percent.

Fuel and power edged down 0.01 percent, while food and allied slipped 0.23 percent, pharmaceuticals 0.32 percent, and engineering 1.31 percent.

## China's factory activity likely slows again: poll

REUTERS, Beijing

China's factory activity probably shrank for a sixth straight month in September, keeping alive calls for more stimulus in the world's second-largest economy to fend off a sharp slowdown as a US trade deal remains distant.

The survey of 32 economists forecast the official purchasing managers' index (PMI) would edge up to 49.6 from August's 49.4, remaining below the 50-point threshold that separates growth from contraction. The data is due on Tuesday.

The prolonged slump underlines the twin pressures on China's economy: domestic demand has failed to mount a durable recovery in the years since the pandemic while US President Donald Trump's tariffs have squeezed Chinese factories as well as overseas firms that buy components for finished goods.

Malaysia's Maybank Investment Bank returned the highest poll reading of 50.0, indicating no change, while Pantheon Macroeconomics gave the lowest forecast of 49.0.

Policymakers rolled out a series of consumer loan subsidies in mid-August, a decision vindicated by separate factory output and retail sales data, opens new tab for the month, which saw their weakest growth in 12 months.

Pan Gongsheng, the governor of the People's Bank of China, said last week a range of monetary policy tools to support the economy remained available, but refrained from following the US Federal Reserve with a rate cut, as some economists speculated the central bank might.

Despite signs the \$19 trillion economy is losing momentum, authorities appear in no hurry to roll out major stimulus measures, given resilient exports and a stock market rally, market watchers say.

## NBR expands duty-free

FROM PAGE B1

Until now, businesses selling part of their production at home had to pay full import duty on raw materials, then claim a refund from the Duty Exemption and Drawback Office after exporting the finished goods.

"Now they will be able to bring raw materials against export orders by giving a bank guarantee equivalent to the total amount of import tariffs applicable to the raw materials. Once export proceeds come, they will be able to get their bank guarantee back," said a senior NBR official.

"We expect a big impact. It will be a starting step to come out of the dependency on garment exports," said Mohammad Naziur Rahman Miah, first secretary for customs, export and bond at the NBR.

The notification says that manufacturers will have to hold export orders or contracts with foreign buyers, such as letters of credit (L/Cs), and ensure at least 30 percent value addition to quality.

Partial exporters will also require permission from the Chief Controller Office of Imports and Exports as industrial consumers and must comply with value-added tax (VAT) rules.

Selim H Rahman, chairman and managing director of Hatil Furniture, welcomed the decision, calling it "a long-standing demand" from industry players.

"This opens a new door for many Bangladeshi manufacturers, those who primarily sell locally but can contribute to exports if given the right support. Even small contributions, when aggregated, can lead to a large export basket," he said.

High tariffs on imported raw materials had left Bangladeshi products struggling to compete internationally despite adding value, added Rahman.

He added, "That was our biggest challenge, and the government has now eased rules. This is a big opportunity for us to approach new buyers, explore new markets, and

build a stronger export footprint."

Abdur Razzak, president of the Bangladesh Engineering Industry Owners Association, urged the authorities to ensure the policy delivers results. "What we need now is action, not promises."

Ferdous Ara Begum, chief executive officer of Business Initiative Leading Development (BUILD), said many small and medium-sized enterprises export partially but could not access bonded warehouse benefits under previous regulations.

She said the facility had been limited to 100 percent export-oriented industries, leaving out many small entrepreneurs who also serve the domestic market.

"These enterprises often import raw materials commercially, which puts them at a competitive disadvantage," Ferdous said.

She added that although the import policy allowed partial exporters to benefit under certain conditions, such as obtaining a utilisation declaration from the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB), a value addition certificate from the customs commission, and providing a 100 percent bank guarantee, implementation had remained inconsistent.

## India to launch

FROM PAGE B1

He said inflation is at 2 percent, the lowest in a decade, while GDP growth stood at 7.8 percent in the last quarter of the current financial year.

He also emphasised that India's banking sector is robust and interest rates have come down.

The US imposition of a 50 percent import tax on products from India, including 25 percent on India's purchase of Russian oil, has sparked a tariff fiasco.

The two countries are also in talks for a bilateral trade deal, but India's refusal to open up its farm and dairy sectors remains a key roadblock to achieving it.

## Govt abruptly Post-harvest losses dissolves

FROM PAGE B1

"Our mandate extended beyond the NBR separation to strengthening reforms, boosting revenue collection, enhancing stakeholder engagement, and modernising the revenue system," said Mazid.

"We will submit our report to the government in the coming months and also make it public for the people," he said.

The government move came a day after Farid Uddin, one of the committee members, remarked that if the separation of the NBR were to happen "out of spite," it would create a "disastrous" situation for the nation.

In a roundtable meeting in Dhaka, he also expressed concerns that the committee's recommendations for remoulding the NBR into two entities—Revenue Policy and Revenue Management—were not adequately reflected in the ordinance.

Another committee member, Aminur Rahman, told The Daily Star, "We just shared a preliminary report with the government. We were supposed to submit a comprehensive report following consultations with the stakeholders. Amid this situation, we got the notice."

Seeking anonymity, a committee member apprehended that Farid Uddin's comments could have prompted the finance ministry to dissolve the committee as a punitive measure.

The member warned that such rash steps could raise doubts over whether genuine reforms would be brought about for the NBR.

NBR Chairman Md Abdur Rahman Khan could not be reached for comment despite multiple attempts.

Unlike the other government reform committees set up through Cabinet Division directives, this committee was formed through an order of the Internal Resources Division under the finance ministry.

The government has also not yet made public the committee's recommendations on the NBR's split.

FROM PAGE B1

Highlighting the strong partnership between Bangladesh and Denmark in food and agriculture, Karlsen said greater cooperation was needed to build a sustainable food value chain that protects both producers and consumers.

Dia Sanu, deputy Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) representative, said food loss in Bangladesh remained "alarmingly high."

A recent FAO study found post-harvest losses of 17.8 percent for paddy, 17.6 percent for wheat, and 17 percent to 32 percent for fruits and vegetables, with mango showing the highest loss at 31.7 percent.

Animal products were not spared either, with losses of 8 percent for milk, 13 percent for eggs, and 17 percent for poultry. In fisheries, poor icing and handling practices led to an average loss of 12.5 percent.

To combat these challenges, the FAO has introduced initiatives in Dhaka to improve food distribution systems and in Cox's Bazar, where 25 aggregation centres train farmers in washing, grading, and safe transport of fresh produce.

"Food waste is highest among affluent households. Tackling this requires both stronger supply chains and greater public awareness," Sanu said.

Jesse Wood, the WFP's deputy country director and officer-in-charge in Bangladesh, underscored the economic toll of the crisis.

"Food loss is not only about hunger—it is about billions lost from the national economy. Every kilogramme wasted is money out of farmers' pockets and fewer resources for development," he said.

The WFP estimates that 25 percent to 40 percent of fruits and vegetables, worth \$2.4 billion annually, rot before reaching consumers due to poor storage and cold chain facilities.

Similarly, between 8 percent and 15 percent of rice and nearly 30 percent of fish are wasted post-

harvest, while poultry incurs about 17 percent losses.

To respond, the WFP has set up 62 aggregation centres in Cox's Bazar and 4 in Kurigram, where farmers receive training, storage access, and marketing support.

These centres also supply quality food to refugee camps and vulnerable communities. Looking ahead, the WFP is rolling out hermetic storage, mechanised drying, and digital traceability tools to further cut losses.

"Cutting waste is the fastest way to save money, protect farmers, and feed more people," Wood stressed.

The session was moderated by Fahmida Khatun, executive director of the CPD, and attended by government representatives, including Mohammed Yasin, additional secretary to the Ministry of Food.

## Govt to conduct

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The secretary said that a free trade agreement might be a more practical option, since such deals involve fewer strict conditions and allow issues such as trade in goods, services and Rules of Origin to be negotiated and improved jointly.

Even if Bangladesh secures GSP Plus status, its main export item, garments, may still not qualify for benefits.

Because, under the safeguard clause of the EU GSP Plus, a six percent threshold applies to any specific product. Bangladeshi garments have already crossed 21 percent across all criteria.

Another rule caps a country's share of imported clothing under the EU LDC, GSP and GSP Plus categories at 37 percent, but Bangladesh has already crossed 50 percent.

Mohammad Abdur Razzaque, chairman of local think tank Research and Policy Integration for Development (RAPID), said, "Bangladesh will have to negotiate intensively with the EU for the removal of such stringent conditions if it wants to obtain the GSP Plus status."

# SMEs need strong marketing, branding: experts

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Despite contributing about 28 percent to Bangladesh's GDP, the potential of cottage, micro, small and medium enterprises (CMSMEs) remains constrained by limited finance, poor infrastructure, weak policy support, restricted market access, and slow adoption of technology, industry leaders said yesterday.

Speaking at a seminar on branding and marketing challenges for the sector at the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry, its president Taskeen Ahmed said nearly 90 percent of Bangladesh's industrial sector consists of CMSMEs. The sector employs about 1.18 crore people.

However, he noted that the additional tariffs imposed recently by the United States on Bangladeshi exports, particularly on readymade garments, pose a significant risk for the sector as they will lead to higher production and export costs.

To stay competitive, local entrepreneurs must embrace innovation, improve efficiency, and move away from outdated practices, he said. "We need to embrace technology at a faster pace and leave old-school traditional thinking and mindset, as we want to have more development for our country."

Stating that complex import-export rules, high costs, and weak global competitiveness also hold back the sector, Ahmed urged stronger support through certification, compliance, training, and incentives for sustainable technology adoption.

He stressed improving product quality and branding, expanding exports with government support, developing clusters and a CMSME database, attracting foreign investment, and supporting startups.

Also speaking at the event, Industries Secretary Md Obaidur Rahman said the absence of strong national brands has prevented Bangladesh from achieving its export potential.

The government will revise the SME and industry policies to include new and emerging business sectors, he added.

He emphasised improving product quality, branding, and IPR protection, adding that the Ministry of Industries is working to boost GI product exports.



**To stay competitive, small businesses must embrace innovation, improve efficiency, and move away from outdated practices, say experts.** PHOTO: STAR/FILE

Md Saiful Islam, chairman of the Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation, said the agency is supporting entrepreneurs through industrial parks, low-cost finance, and training, while working to exempt holding taxes in its parks.

He urged expanding Bangladeshi products on global e-commerce platforms, improving packaging and labeling, and increasing international certifications to boost exports.

Mohammad Hasan Arif, vice-chairman of the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB), said consumer preferences are key to branding, stressing stronger public-private coordination.

In order to expand the presence of Bangladeshi products in the global market, he said, "First, we need to change

the mindset of our local consumers." He said the EPB will set up an Export Ecosystem Platform and a CMSME Help Desk, where representatives from relevant government agencies will be designated as local points.

The agency will also organise training to upskill workers and facilitate Bangladeshi participation in international fairs, including one in Brazil next year, he added.

Muhammad Mustafizur Rahman, director (current charge) of the SME & Special Programmes Department at Bangladesh Bank, pointed to the importance of product logos, consumer-focused design, and promotions.

He noted that entrepreneurs can now access Tk 5 lakh collateral-free loans, with

12 percent of SME loans already disbursed without collateral by December last year.

Shamim Ahmed, president of the Bangladesh Plastic Goods Manufacturers and Exporters Association, highlighted the necessity of designing products by considering the tastes, culture, and environment of people in specific geographical regions.

Md Shafat Kadir, founder and CEO of Hat Bakso, said although reciprocal tariffs recently imposed by the United States have increased product costs, effective branding and marketing can open new export opportunities.

He stressed the need for standardised, attractive packaging, along with proper branding models and effective marketing to boost global competitiveness.

## Endangered growth

MAMUNUR RAHMAN

The news on Priya's phone screen felt like a ghost. It was a report of numbers: poverty at nearly 28 percent, jobless growth. These figures seemed so remote from her life in the Korail slum as the glass towers of Gulshan. She had once believed in the "development miracle" of Bangladesh, leaving her village in the hope of joining it. Now it seemed that the miracle was a party for a select few, and she was left outside, looking in.

A university graduate in computer science, Priya embodied the report's starkest finding: jobless growth. Her formal education, the supposed golden ticket, had led to a dead end. The new jobs were for a specialised workforce speaking a language of algorithms she had to master alone. News anchors spoke of AI and automation. A UN report warned their benefits would be concentrated in the hands of a privileged few. A Morgan Stanley prediction of \$3 trillion in AI investment sounded to her like a death knell for the dreams of women needing work, not abstract miracles.

She scrolled further. Extreme poverty had risen to 9.35 percent. This ghost was a truth she already knew. Her mother had toiled in the fields. Her sister, a garment worker, had lost her job to a machine. The report called it a "gender gap" and a "flawed poverty reduction model". Priya saw a system devaluing the labour of women who formed the backbone of the RMG sector while replacing them with machines. The city that once promised opportunity now felt like a cold engine, and she was a cog it no longer needed.

Priya found a desperate new purpose in the "gig economy". Experts described a digital ecosystem offering "flexible" work. It sounded like a lifeline.

In a cheap internet café, she applied for data entry, transcription and coding tasks, but faced a wall of rejection. She was competing not just with a global workforce but with AI models doing the same tasks faster and cheaper. She recalled a report stating AI talent in the region was small and that women would be disproportionately affected. Her sister's factory job had been taken by a sewing automaton; now her own degree had become just as worthless, replaced by a ghost in a machine.

The stark truth was clear: "if it is not engendered, then it is endangered". The very systems promising progress were sidelining women like Priya. Reports from the World Bank and the ILO noted the potential of online gig work to offer flexibility but also documented its vulnerabilities.

Female gig workers, often doing lower-paid tasks in domestic or beauty services, faced unpredictable wages, no social security and higher rates of harassment. The automation that had displaced her sister from the factory floor now threatened Priya's efforts to find a foothold in the digital world. These findings were not just about a "gender gap". They were a warning that as Bangladesh's economy evolved, the very women who had powered its growth were being left behind, their futures imperilled by a technological shift they had no role in shaping.

Walking through the chaotic streets of Farmgate, Priya saw her failure reflected in its neon. She spotted Nabil, a former student leader who had fought against the job quota system for a merit-based future. He walked with a weary slump. "They made promises," he told her, his voice heavy with disillusion. "It was just to quiet us. No real commitment. The gap is wider than ever."

Priya realised the ghost in the machine was not only a number or a robotic arm; it was the growing distance between her and Nabil, between their shared dreams and a political reality with no room for them. She thought of a UNICEF report she had skimmed, about AI's potential to "widen existing inequalities". It was not a warning but a prophecy, and she was living it.

The writer is coordinator of Ella Alliance and founder of Ella Pad

PHOTO: STAR/FILE

## Jamuna Bank to issue bonds to raise Tk 800cr

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Jamuna Bank has received regulatory approval to raise Tk 800 crore through the issuance of bonds under private placement.

The Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission, in a letter dated September 28, approved the bond, according to a disclosure posted on the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) website yesterday.

The move follows an earlier announcement on April 21, 2025, when Jamuna Bank's board decided to raise capital through bond issuance to strengthen its balance sheet and support future growth.

Jamuna Bank reported a decline in net profit for the April-June quarter despite an increase in investment income.

The private commercial lender's consolidated net profit for the second quarter of 2025 fell by 8 percent year-on-year, reaching Tk 131.54 crore.

As per DSE data, as of August 31, 2025, sponsors and directors held 40.98 percent of the company's shares. The public held the largest portion with 55.43 percent, while the remaining 3.59 percent was owned by institutional and foreign investors.

## Gold surges past \$3,800/oz

REUTERS

Gold prices surged above \$3,800 an ounce for the first time on Monday, driven by rising bets on a US Federal Reserve rate cut that weakened the dollar, while concerns over a possible US government shutdown bolstered safe-haven demand.

Spot gold jumped 1.4 percent to \$3,812.49 per ounce by 0727 GMT, after hitting \$3,819.59 earlier in the session. US gold futures for December delivery rose 0.9 percent to \$3,842.20.

The US dollar index fell 0.2 percent, making greenback-priced bullion less expensive for overseas buyers. US President Donald Trump will meet with the top Democratic and Republican leaders in Congress later on Monday to discuss extending government funding. Without a deal, a shutdown would begin on Wednesday.

"With the Fed set to cut further rates over the next six months, I



think there should be more upside for the yellow metal, targeting a level of \$3,900/oz," said UBS analyst Giovanni Staunovo.

"Concern about the (US) government shutdown are also supporting demand for safe haven assets like gold," he added.

The US Personal Consumption Expenditures (PCE) Price Index on Friday matched expectations,

reinforcing bets on further Fed rate cuts, with traders assigning a 90 percent chance of a 25-basis point cut in October and a 65 percent probability for December, according to the CME FedWatch Tool.

Gold, which benefits from lower interest rates and thrives during geopolitical and economic uncertainty, has gained more than 45 percent year-to-date.

## Pubali Bank to raise Tk 500cr through bonds

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Pubali Bank has received regulatory approval to raise Tk 500 crore through the issuance of its fifth subordinated bond.

In a disclosure on the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) website yesterday, the bank said the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission granted consent in a letter dated September 28 to issue the bond through private placement.

The approval is subject to compliance with all relevant laws and regulatory requirements.

Pubali Bank said the proceeds will be used to strengthen its capital base.

The bank had earlier announced on May 5 this year that its board had decided to raise capital through a subordinated bond.

Pubali Bank's profit surged in the April-June quarter, buoyed by higher investment income.

The bank posted a profit of Tk 393 crore in the second quarter of 2025, marking a 38 percent year-on-year growth.

As of August 31, 2025, the shareholding structure of the bank was: sponsors and directors 28.20 percent, institutional investors 28.09 percent, foreign investors 0.12 percent, and the general public 43.59 percent, as per DSE data.

## China's new K visa beckons foreign tech talent as US hikes H-1B fee

REUTERS, Beijing

China's new visa programme aimed at attracting foreign tech talent kicks off this week, a move seen boosting Beijing's fortunes in its geopolitical rivalry with Washington as a new US visa policy prompts would-be applicants to scramble for alternatives.

While China has no shortage of skilled local engineers, the programme is part of an effort by Beijing to portray itself as a country welcoming foreign investment and talent, as rising trade tensions due to US tariffs cloud the country's economic outlook.

China has taken a series of measures to boost foreign investment and travel, opening more sectors to overseas investors and offering visa waivers for citizens from most European countries, Japan and South Korea among others.

"The symbolism is powerful: while the US raises barriers, China is lowering them," said Iowa-based immigration attorney Matt Mauntel-Medici, referring to China's new visa category, called the K visa, which launches on Wednesday.

The K visa, announced in August, targets young foreign science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)

graduates and promises to allow entry, residence and employment without a job offer, which could appeal to foreign workers looking for alternatives to US job opportunities.

Earlier this month, the Trump administration said it would ask companies to pay \$100,000 per year for H-1B worker visas, widely used by tech companies to hire skilled foreign workers.



**An employee at a business centre in Beijing watches the Chinese national flag being raised. While China has no shortage of skilled local engineers, the programme is part of an effort by Beijing to portray itself as a country welcoming foreign investment and talent.** PHOTO: REUTERS/FILE

"The US has definitely shot itself in the foot on H-1Bs, and the timing is exquisite for China's K visa," said Michael Feller, chief strategist at Geopolitical Strategy.

Other countries including South Korea, Germany and New Zealand are also loosening visa rules to attract skilled migrants.

Immigration experts say the main attraction of the K visa is no requirement of a sponsoring employer, which has been regarded as one of the biggest hurdles for those seeking H-1B visas.

The H-1B visa requires employer sponsorship and is subject to a lottery system, with only 85,000 slots available annually. The new \$100,000 fee could further deter first-time applicants.

"It's an appealing alternative for Indian STEM professionals seeking flexible, streamlined visa options," said Bikash Kali Das, an Indian student at Sichuan University.

India was by far the largest beneficiary of H-1B visas last year, accounting for 71 percent of approved beneficiaries.

Despite its promise, the K visa faces hurdles. Chinese government guidelines mention vague "age, educational background and work experience" requirements.

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