

## Shahjalal Islami Bank sponsor to gift Tk 48cr shares to son

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Abdul Halim, a sponsor of Shahjalal Islami Bank PLC, will transfer more than 2.62 crore shares to his son, Abdul Hakim, a general shareholder of the lender, by way of gift.

Based on yesterday's closing price of Tk 18.4 per share of the Shariah-based bank, the transfer value stands at Tk 48,208 crore.

The transfer will take place outside the trading system by October 31, according to a disclosure on the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) website yesterday.

In recent months, the disclosure of share transfers by sponsors or directors of listed firms by way of gift has become almost regular.

On October 4, Dhaka Bank Director Mirza Yasser Abbas, son of BNP leader Mirza Abbas, expressed his interest in transferring 3.13 crore shares to his mother, Afroza Abbas, a sponsor of the company, by way of gift.

**In recent months, the disclosure of share transfers by sponsors or directors of listed firms by way of gift has become almost regular**

Market stakeholders said sponsors or directors usually gift shares to their close relatives when they plan to bring their relatives onto the board of the company.

A tax exemption on the transfer of properties, including shares, among spouses, children, and siblings is another reason.

The National Board of Revenue (NBR), through the Finance Act 2024, exempted tax on the transfer of properties including shares among spouses and between parents and children. This year, it widened the benefit by including the provision of non taxation on transfer of any tangible or intangible assets including shares among siblings.

As a result, many large investors prefer to gift shares to their sons and daughters.

Shahjalal Islami Bank reported a 5 percent decline in profit to Tk 159 crore in the April-June quarter of 2025, despite modest growth in investment income, according to its financial statements.

As of August 31, 2025, sponsor-directors held 41.36 percent of the company's shares, institutions held 25.49 percent, foreign investors held 0.01 percent, and the public held the remaining 33.14 percent, DSE data showed.



PHOTO: DIPANKAR ROY

During peak season, around 60-70 boats are sold each market day at the Sheikhpara boat market in Khulna's Terokhada upazila. In the south-western delta of Bangladesh crisscrossed by canals and wetlands, a wooden boat remains as essential as a bicycle or motorcycle in the cities.

# Sheikhpara boat market: Sustaining livelihoods in a drying delta

DIPANKAR ROY, Khulna

In the southwestern delta of Bangladesh, where roads vanish under monsoon waters, boats are critical for survival. Whether it is fishing, visiting the local bazaar, harvesting crops, or going to school, the rainy season demands one thing above all — a boat. This necessity has made the vessel an indispensable part of the rural economy. For those looking to buy one, the best destination remains the century-old Sheikhpara boat market in Khulna's Terokhada upazila.

As one of the largest in the region, the market continues to serve as an economic hub for communities that depend on the rivers and canals of the delta. Held twice weekly, on Mondays and Fridays, it draws buyers and traders from Khulna, Bagerhat, Narail, and Gopalganj.

Each market day, rows of handmade wooden boats line the banks of what remains of the Aatharobeki River, waiting for farmers, fishermen, and transporters who still rely on waterways for their livelihoods.

According to the market's current leaseholder, Md Eskandar Molla, the market generates transactions worth around Tk 40 crore during the peak season from mid-June to mid-October, with 60-70 boats sold per day. "We collect Tk 300 to 400 as a lease fee per boat, though sometimes we waive it for poor traders."

Each boat, priced between Tk 3,000 and Tk 6,000 depending on size and design, brings a modest profit of Tk 300 Tk 500 per trader, though the economic footprint extends far wider. From tree cutters and sawmill operators to carpenters, transporters, and market porters — at least eight occupational groups earn directly from the trade. Food vendors and tea stalls also benefit from the crowds the market attracts.

### DWINDLING WATERWAYS

The Sheikhpara market traces its history back over a century, to when rivers were Bengal's main transport arteries.

Local elders recall its origins during the British colonial period, when villagers

gathered by the Aatharobeki River to trade fishing nets, bamboo traps, and wooden boats. Over time, it became renowned for handcrafted boats made in Bagerhat's Chitalmari upazila, about 40 kilometres away.

Traders from Chitalmari once floated their cargo through a network of canals — a two-day journey via Kodalia Beel, Kendua Beel, and the Aatharobeki River. Today, those routes are largely gone. Canals have been silted up, encroached upon, or converted to farmland.

Boats now travel by road, stacked 10 to 12 at a time on small motorised vehicles such as nosimon or tomtom.

"Transportation by road is faster but costlier," said Selim Hossain, a trader of three decades. "The waterways have dried up or been filled for cultivation."

### Held twice weekly, the market draws buyers and traders from Khulna, Bagerhat, Narail, and Gopalganj

Unsold boats are loaded back in the afternoon, to be taken home or kept under a trader's custody until the next market day.

According to the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority, navigable waterways have fallen to roughly 3,800 kilometres in the dry season, down from more than 12,000 kilometres in the 1960s. The loss has increased logistics costs and reduced access for thousands of rural producers.

### CRAFT UNDER THREAT

For many boat sellers, the business is ancestral, says Hassan Mollah, a Chitalmari resident who entered the business following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather.

"We buy timber, mostly mahogany, and hire local carpenters to make boats at home. It's hard work, but this is our family trade," he said.

"Boats are not just wood and nails," said boatmaker Mollah. "They carry our heritage, our work, and our connection to the water. As long as there is a river in Bangladesh, there

will be boats in Sheikhpara."

But as waterways continue to decline, the tradition of boatmaking is under strain. With fewer navigable rivers and rising timber costs, many fear the craft could fade away.

Former union parishad member Kabirul Haque recalls a time when 300-350 boats were sold in a single day. Today, sales have dropped to 70-80. "Over 2,000 people were once directly involved in boatmaking and related work," he said.

In Bagerhat's Chitalmari upazila, dozens of small workshops that once ran year-round now lie silent.

"The price of timber and labour keeps rising, but boat prices haven't changed," said 72-year-old boatmaker Haradhan Mollick, who has been making boats for some 30 years. "After paying for wood, paint, and wages, there's almost nothing left. Many of us have shifted to construction or day labour."

Boatmakers use mahogany and local hardwoods, which are becoming expensive due to restrictions on logging and increased demand from the furniture industry.

"This transition signifies not just the loss of income but the erosion of a century-old skill. We need to reopen and restore our rivers and canals to make them navigable again. These waterways, naturally formed over time, require no bricks, sand, or cement to repair — only the will to let nature flow freely," Mollick added.

Once known as the "Land of Rivers," Bangladesh's rural life has long revolved around water. In Khulna Division alone, more than 130 rivers shape daily existence. Though the number of waterways is dwindling, in districts like Khulna, Bagerhat, Gopalganj, and Narail — crisscrossed by canals and wetlands — a wooden boat remains as essential as a bicycle or motorcycle in the cities.

"Boats are part of our life," said Omar Ali Biswas, a farmer from Mokampur village under Terokhada, who came to buy a new boat for Tk 3,200. "Without a boat, it's impossible to move around or work in our fields during the monsoon."

## Shareholders face uncertainty over Islamic banks' merger

M SHAHRIAR AZAD BHUIYAN

Bangladesh's banking sector is entering a historic transformation as five Shariah-based private commercial banks prepare to merge into a single state-owned Islamic bank. The institutions under consideration are First Security Islami Bank, Global Islami Bank, Union Bank, Social Islami Bank and EXIM Bank. Backed by the Bangladesh Bank, the merger aims to restore confidence in Islamic banking, improve governance and strengthen financial stability. Yet for shareholders, one question remains: what will happen to their investments?

As of September 23, this year, the stock market tells a bleak story. First Security Islami Bank is trading at Tk 1.9, Global Islami Bank at Tk 1.5, Union Bank at Tk 1.6, Social Islami Bank at Tk 3.3 and EXIM Bank at Tk 2.9. Each share has a face value of Tk 10, but they now trade at a fraction of that. Investors have already suffered losses of 70 to 85 percent. Against this backdrop, the merger announcement has deepened uncertainty, as shareholders still do not know how their investments will be treated once consolidation is complete.

The central bank is leading the merger due to concerns over non-performing loans, scams and weak governance under political influence. Yet one crucial issue has been overlooked: the fate of shareholders. The Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC), which protects investor interests in listed companies, has so far remained outside the process. There has been no clarity on how share swaps will take place, what the valuation formula will be or how minority investors' rights will be protected.

This lack of coordination between the banking and market regulators has left investors in limbo. In any merger, the share swap ratio determines how existing shareholders' equity converts into the new entity. This depends on the financial health and asset quality of each merging bank. For example, Social Islami Bank, which still trades higher at Tk 3.3, has investors worried their shares will be diluted to absorb weaker banks. Meanwhile, shareholders of Global Islami Bank and Union Bank fear that their already-depressed shares could lose more value once merger terms are set. With no official guidance, speculation has fuelled market volatility.

The risks are serious. Investors may see their holdings converted into fewer shares of the new bank, locking in permanent losses. The merged entity will likely focus on repairing its balance sheet, meaning dividend payouts are unlikely soon. Until clarity emerges on swap ratios and governance, uncertainty will continue to weigh on share prices and erode confidence.

Many analysts argue that the crisis is not only financial but also political. Years of mismanagement, politically driven lending and poor regulatory oversight created the conditions for this drastic intervention. While protecting depositors has been the main goal, the interests of retail shareholders — ordinary citizens who put their savings into these banks — have been sidelined. The collapse in share prices to between Tk 1.5 and Tk 3.3 against a Tk 10 face value shows how trust in the system has eroded.

For now, shareholders have little choice but to remain patient. Selling at current levels would mean losses of up to 80 percent, while holding may bring some recovery if the new state-owned Islamic bank eventually regains stability. Pressure is growing on the BSEC to act. Investors should monitor developments closely and be prepared for a long wait before the new entity becomes profitable.

The merger of five Islamic banks is a watershed moment for the country's financial system. Unless the Bangladesh Bank and the BSEC coordinate to ensure fair treatment, shareholders risk becoming the silent losers in a restructuring designed mainly to safeguard depositors. Confidence in the financial system cannot be rebuilt without transparency, and it is this transparency that will determine whether the new bank's shares regain value or remain a graveyard for investor savings.

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The firm's research shows victims lost an average of \$1,471 per scam, with \$12 billion reported lost to fraud last year, a 21 percent increase compared to the previous year.

"We're seeing a perfect storm of factors — a tight labor market, where more people are urgently competing for fewer opportunities, is creating pressure that scammers exploit," Lisa Plaggemier, executive director of the nonprofit National Cybersecurity Alliance, told AFP.

"At the same time, generative AI has made it easier for bad actors to craft convincing fake postings, recruiter profiles, and even interview scripts.

"The combination means scams are harder to spot, and job seekers, especially first-time applicants, are more vulnerable than ever." Becker's experience — who immediately ceased all communication with the scammers — illustrates a common scam tactic: fraudsters run a long con, counting on job seekers to let their guard down after clearing a few hurdles in the interview process.

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) recently warned consumers about "fake check scams," in which fraudsters pose as employers and send counterfeit checks, instructing victims to purchase equipment from selected vendors.

"If you get an offer that includes depositing a check and then using some of the money for any reason, that's a scam. Walk away," the FTC said.

## Gold climbs above \$3,900 level for first time

REUTERS

Gold prices touched an all-time high on Monday, soaring above the \$3,900-per-ounce level, as investors flocked to safe-haven bullion amid the US government shutdown, broader economic uncertainty, and prospects of further Federal Reserve rate cuts.

Spot gold was up 1.5 percent at \$3,942.59 per ounce, as of 0910 GMT, after hitting \$3,949.34 earlier in the session.

US gold futures for December delivery climbed 1.5 percent to \$3,967.10. Washington will start mass layoffs of federal workers if US President Donald Trump decides negotiations with congressional Democrats to end a partial government shutdown are "absolutely going nowhere," a senior White House official said on Sunday.

"Appetite for gold remains heavily stimulated by the ongoing US government shutdown," said Lukman Otunuga, senior research analyst at FXTM. "There may be some FOMO buying on the current price but for others there is likely a sense that this particular financial lifeboat has sailed," said independent analyst Ross Norman.

Gold has climbed nearly 50 percent so far this year, underpinned by strong central bank buying, increased demand for gold-backed exchange-traded funds, a weaker dollar and growing interest from retail investors seeking a hedge amid rising trade and geopolitical tensions.

This rally, characterised by low participation and primarily driven by central banks with a long-term outlook and steady investors rather than speculative buyers, indicates that any pullback might be milder than expected, Norman said, adding that this could present a buying opportunity on dips while the rally maintains its momentum.

## Surging scams roil US job hunters

AFP, Washington

After a series of interviews, Nicole Becker was ecstatic to receive a job offer from a sportswear brand. But like many Americans navigating a tough job market, she was soon confronted with a sobering reality — the recruiter was a scammer.

From fake job listings to fraudsters posing as real recruiters, employment scams are exploding online — fueled by a cooling labor market and a boom in generative AI that experts say has made these schemes more sophisticated than ever.

In July, a purported Chinese brand offered Becker — a 37-year-old based in Oregon — a coveted role to lead global communications after an elaborate and legitimate-looking recruitment process that stretched over two weeks.

There were no red flags after an initial online interview with a supposed human resources official was followed by a call with someone calling himself the head of marketing and sales.

Then came the offer letter, accompanied by a detailed PowerPoint deck outlining her assigned role, budget, and performance targets for the first six months. Both parties promptly signed the agreement. But a week later, during an onboarding meeting, Becker picked up the first hint that something was amiss.

She was told that the company's servers had been destroyed in California's wildfires. As a result, she would have to

purchase a laptop and cellphone from a designated retailer herself, with the promise of reimbursement in her first paycheck.

"That's when my heart sank and I was like, 'oh no, I fell for a fake job,'" Becker told AFP, requesting that her real name be withheld. "It is so scary because I consider myself to be a smart and clued-in person, especially with what's going on with AI and scams in general. If I can get scammed,

I feel this can happen to anybody."

Employment-related scams jumped by over 1,000 percent from May through July, a period when new graduates typically search for jobs, according to the US firm McAfee.

Nearly 1 in 3 Americans report receiving job offer scams via text message, highlighting how "these schemes have moved beyond email into our daily conversations," McAfee said.



Candidates speak with a recruiter at a job fair in Sunrise, Florida. Employment-related scams jumped by over 1,000 percent from May through July, a period when new graduates typically search for jobs.

PHOTO: AFP/FILE