



BBS still relies on paper for 60% of data

Economists advocate for autonomy, resources and expertise

JAGARAN CHAKMA

When artificial intelligence is transforming the way official statistics are produced, the state-run statistics bureau still gathers around 60 percent of its data through old, paper-based methods.

This reliance on manual data collection has often led the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) facing questions about its credibility, according to top BBS officials.

Apart from concerns over data accuracy, the outdated system causes several setbacks.

For example, paper-based methods delay the release of agricultural output data, which is important for food security; limit policy response to rising unemployment; and leave room for political quarters to meddle in.

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The "White Paper on the State of the Bangladesh Economy", prepared by a group of economists after the fall of the previous government, described the country's data ecosystem as "highly foggy and toxic". It also called for rejuvenating the data ecosystem.

In response, the interim government has introduced several reform measures to modernise the statistical agency, said BBS Director General Mohammed Mizanur Rahman. He said the benefits would become evident once the initiatives were fully implemented in the coming years.

Against this backdrop, Bangladesh is observing World Statistics Day today.

Explaining the slow transition from paper-based to digital systems, BBS DG Rahman cited budget constraints and sluggish institutional reforms.

He said BBS has begun using computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) for some surveys through tablets, but has yet to expand the system nationwide.

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Competition Commission may get search and seizure powers

Trade bodies welcome proposed amendments but stress accountability

SUKANTA HALDER

Similar to raids by tax officials, the Bangladesh Competition Commission (BCC) will be able to search offices and seize documents, computers and electronic data, according to proposed amendments to the Competition Act.

The commission staff will be allowed to interrogate suspects, and prepare seizure lists while

Competition Act-2012.

Businesses dissatisfied with commission penalties will be able to appeal to a new Competition Appellate Tribunal. However, they must first deposit 25 percent of the imposed fine. If the appeal succeeds, the amount will be refunded. The tribunal's decision will be considered final.

A law teacher at Dhaka University welcomed the proposed changes but said the draft does

after careful review.

The Competition Commission, created under the 2012 law, began operations in 2016. It functions as a referee in the marketplace, ensuring fair play among businesses, preventing price fixing, and protecting consumers from unfair practices.

LAW TO CURB DIGITAL MANIPULATION, FORM APPEAL TRIBUNAL

The draft law empowers the commission to take legal action against those using algorithms, automated pricing or digital tools to distort competition in online markets.

Officials said the aim is to align the law with modern digital economies and to tackle abuses of market dominance.

Another new clause identifies exclusive control over consumer data as an abuse of dominance if used to block competitors from entering the market.

In the draft, the commission has also proposed forming an appeal tribunal. It will handle appeals against commission decisions.

It will have a chairperson, who must be a Supreme Court judge or someone with at least twenty years of judicial experience, and up to two members with at least twenty years of experience in economics, law, business, or accountancy. Only one member from each field can be appointed.

Appeals must be lodged within 30 days of receiving the order, with payment of the required fee. If the appeal involves a financial penalty, the appellant must deposit 25 percent of the fine. Tribunal rulings will be final.

To ensure fair hearings and due process, the draft emphasised an independent tribunal, similar to systems found in many developed countries.

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

Business leaders and economists have given the amendments a guarded welcome.

Taskeen Ahmed, president of the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI), said the changes could strengthen

global best practices and was prepared

not have measures to ensure the accountability of the commission.

Meanwhile, trade chambers expressed concern that some provisions could lead to increased harassment of businesses.

However, commission officials said the draft follows global best practices and was prepared

recording video evidence in presence of witnesses, according to the draft.

It also introduces a leniency provision, allowing reduced or waived punishment for individuals, groups or organisations that admit wrongdoing and cooperate fully during investigations. This clause is new to the current

Current status
The commission is currently hearing 34 cases. It has delivered 54 verdicts since its establishment



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Incentives, awareness key to boosting digital payments: experts

STAR BUSINESS DESK

A multi pronged strategy involving incentives, awareness campaigns, and habit formation is essential to promote digital payments in everyday life, said experts at a discussion in Chattogram recently.

They stressed the need for behavioural change among users and a stronger digital ecosystem to support the transition. Cooperation between businesses and financial institutions, diversification of payment options, and improvements in digital literacy and internet infrastructure were also highlighted.

The observations came at a programme, titled "Digital Payment in the Port City", organised by bKash Limited, the country's largest mobile financial service (MFS) provider, at The Peninsula Chittagong, according to a press release.

Entrepreneurs and representatives from Barcode Café, Chattogram, Maa-O-Shishu General Hospital, Radisson Blu Chittagong Bay View, Epic Healthcare, Utshab Supermarket, Chittagong Club Limited, Shajnaz Hospital Limited, Amy (online travel agency), Chittagong Eye Infirmary and Training Complex, Sholpik, The Peninsula Chittagong, Shopping Bag, and several other organisations took part in the event.

Participants noted that while people in many countries can spend an entire day without cash, Bangladeshis are gradually adopting digital payment habits.

However, they emphasised the need for greater awareness to integrate such



Ali Ahmed, chief commercial officer of bKash Limited, poses for group photographs with participants of the discussion, titled "Digital Payment in the Port City", organised by bKash, at The Peninsula Chittagong recently.

PHOTO: BKASH

transactions into daily life.

They also suggested launching regional campaigns in local dialects to engage customers more effectively, along with hands-on training for elderly and less tech savvy users.

Some supermarket owners said around 70 percent of their customers now pay digitally using bank cards or MFS platforms like bKash. With proper initiatives, this share could exceed 90 percent, they added, noting that special

discounts or incentives could further encourage digital payments.

Ali Ahmed, chief commercial officer of bKash, who chaired the event, said that while a large share of digital transactions still involves money transfers and withdrawals, around 10 million people in Bangladesh make different types of digital payments every day.

"This number can multiply with the right policy support and collaboration among tech companies, businesses, and

financial institutions," he said.

Pointing out that the wider use of digital transactions reduces costs for consumers, Ahmed added: "There is a great opportunity to help people who are still anxious about using technology to gain confidence in digital transactions."

Currently, bKash has about 82 million verified customers and around one million merchants, playing a significant role in expanding digital financial inclusion across the country.

bti offers discounts on flat purchases to Prime Bank clients

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Prime Bank PLC has entered into a strategic partnership agreement with Building Technology & Ideas Ltd (bti), one of the leading real estate developers in Bangladesh, to offer discounts on flat purchases for its customers.

M Nazeem A Choudhury, deputy managing director of Prime Bank PLC, and FR Khan, managing director of Building Technology & Ideas Ltd (bti), signed the agreement at the bank's corporate office in Gulshan, Dhaka, recently, according to a press release.

Under the agreement, Prime Bank customers will be able to enjoy special price benefits from Building Technology & Ideas Ltd (bti), enabling them to access premium residential properties with added financial convenience.

Through this partnership, Prime Bank reinforces its commitment to delivering lifestyle-driven financial solutions that add value to its customers' aspirations and enhance their overall banking experience, the release added.

Mamur Ahmed, senior executive vice-president and head of branch distribution at the bank, and Mashrur Hasan Mim, executive director for marketing at the real estate developer, along with other senior officials from both organisations, were also present.



FR Khan, managing director of Building Technology & Ideas Ltd, and M Nazeem A Choudhury, deputy managing director of Prime Bank PLC, pose for photographs after signing the agreement at the bank's corporate office in Gulshan, Dhaka recently.

PHOTO: PRIME BANK

ICC Bangladesh to host ICC Global Banking Commission Meeting in Dhaka



Muhammad A Rumeel Ali, chairman of ICCB Banking Commission, presides over the ICC Bangladesh Banking Commission Meeting at ICCB Secretariat in Gulshan, Dhaka recently. PHOTO: ICC BANGLADESH

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Recently, the ICC Banking Commission, Paris, proposed holding the meeting in collaboration with ICC Bangladesh. The proposal was accepted at the ICC Bangladesh Banking Commission meeting, chaired by Muhammad A (Rumeel) Ali, chairman of the Banking Commission at ICC Bangladesh, held in the capital recently, according

to a press release.

The ICC Global Banking Commission Meeting is held annually on a rotational basis in different countries, while the 2026 edition will take place in the United Kingdom.

The ICC Banking Commission comprises more than 800 members across over 60 countries.

The members of ICC national committees, representatives from multilateral development banks, regulators and public agencies, banks, supply chain finance providers, corporates, fintech firms, development finance institutions, law firms, and insurers attended the annual meeting.

During the 2025 meeting, the ICC Bangladesh Banking Commission reviewed the Secretariat's activities and prepared the ICC Bangladesh Plan of Action 2026. The plan includes organising workshops for bankers, micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), and women entrepreneurs, as well as seminars, roundtables, and dialogues.

It was also decided to hold additional meetings to discuss key issues such as the impact of LDC graduation on financial institutions, the digitalisation of international trade, cybersecurity, and other relevant topics for the development of the banking sector.

Shanta Life to insure New Zealand Dairy employees

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Shanta Life Insurance PLC has signed an agreement with New Zealand Dairy Products Bangladesh Limited to provide comprehensive insurance coverage for the latter's employees and their dependents.

Nafis Akhter Ahmed, chief executive officer of Shanta Life Insurance PLC, and Md Samsul Alam Mallick, managing director of New Zealand Dairy Products Bangladesh Limited, signed the agreement in Dhaka recently, according to a press release.

Beyond financial protection, the initiative aims to promote financial stability and overall well-being for New Zealand Dairy's employees.

Through this collaboration, Shanta Life Insurance reinforces its commitment to delivering high-quality coverage and superior services, safeguarding the people driving New Zealand Dairy's continued success, the release added.



Md Samsul Alam Mallick, managing director of New Zealand Dairy Products Bangladesh Limited, and Nafis Akhter Ahmed, chief executive officer of Shanta Life Insurance PLC, pose for photographs after signing the agreement in Dhaka recently.

PHOTO: SHANTA LIFE INSURANCE

Mercantile Bank Securities gets new vice-chairman

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Profile



Md Ikhthier Khan Prince has recently been elected the new vice-chairman of Mercantile Bank Securities Limited (MBSL) at the 75th board meeting of the company.

Prince is the managing director of Pinnacle Bicycle Industries Limited and a director of both Shamrat Group and Shamrat Cold Storage Ltd, according to a press release.

He is a seasoned business leader with extensive experience in industrial and financial ventures.

Prince is also the proprietor of BMS, a money exchange company, as well as the general secretary of the Al-haj Amran Ullah Khan Foundation.

MBSL expressed confidence that Prince's proven leadership, strategic vision, and diversified business expertise will further strengthen the organisation's governance framework and accelerate its long-term growth, the release added.

US permits Boeing to boost production on 737 MAX

AP, New York

US officials said Friday they granted approval to Boeing to increase production on 737 MAX aircraft in the latest sign of the aviation giant's improving standing with safety regulators.

The planemaker will now be able to produce the single-aisle plane at a rate of 42 per month, up from 38, following approval by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), according to a source familiar with the matter.

"FAA safety inspectors conducted extensive reviews of Boeing's production lines to ensure that this small production rate increase will be done safely," the FAA said.

"Our direct oversight of Boeing's production processes...has not changed," the FAA added. "Safety critical personnel, including inspectors at Boeing, are continuing to work during the government shutdown."

The increase is expected to also boost Boeing's financial performance due to the significant role aircraft deliveries play in the company's revenues. Boeing has reported annual losses the last six years.

Friday's announcement by the FAA is the latest sign of its improved standing with regulators following deadly MAX crashes in 2018 and 2019.

These led to a lengthy grounding of the jet and congressional probes in which the FAA was also criticized for an overly cozy relationship with the company.

US-China trade war

FROM PAGE B4

Two trading blocs would result in "significant global GDP losses in the longer term - up to 7 percent global GDP losses and double-digit welfare losses for developing countries," she said.

The WTO last week sharply lowered its 2026 forecast for global merchandise trade volume growth to 0.5 percent from its previous estimate of 1.8 percent growth in August, citing expected delayed impacts from US President Donald Trump's tariffs. It raised its forecast for global goods trade growth to 2.4 percent for 2025.

Those forecasts were issued before the relative calm of recent months was shattered last week when China imposed new export controls on rare earth metals needed for the technology sector, and Trump responded by imposing new 100 percent duties on Chinese imports starting next month.

Okonjo-Iweala said she told officials from the Group of 20 major economies on Wednesday evening that there could be no global financial stability without global trade stability.

"Pressures on the system have not eased and may intensify," she told the group. "The full effects of recent tariffs are still to be felt. Trade diversion is fueling protectionist sentiment elsewhere. And escalating tensions between the United States and China remain a serious risk."

Okonjo-Iweala said most WTO members had refrained from joining

in the tariff war, and 72 percent of global trade was still following WTO rules despite a series of bilateral trade deals signed by the US with other countries.

The rules-based multilateral system was proving resilient despite the most severe policy shock in eight decades, she said.

But Okonjo-Iweala said organizations like the WTO should use the current multilateralism crisis to undertake long-sought reforms and make the global trade body more flexible and efficient, and able to take advantage of new trade opportunities in digital trade, services and green trade.

"There's absolutely no doubt that there are global problems that cannot be solved by any one country alone, and you will need global cooperation to do it, and that's where multilateralism will still be very, very relevant," she said. "But to make sure that the organizations are really appreciated, we have to reform, and at the WTO, we are ready to work on this."

Okonjo-Iweala said she had a good meeting on Wednesday with Deputy US Trade Representative Joseph Barroso, who was confirmed last week as the US ambassador to the WTO.

She said she was very appreciative that the US had removed the WTO from its list of planned spending cuts to international organizations, and efforts were underway to settle US arrears to the trade body.

Trump extends

FROM PAGE B4

Capital Economics earlier estimated that the United States sources 78 percent of heavy truck imports from Mexico and 15 percent from Canada.

Under the incoming regime, trucks qualifying for favorable USMCA treatment will only see their non-US content hit with the 25 percent tariff.

Eligible truck parts will enter tariff-free until the Commerce Department establishes a process to target their non-US content. Imported buses, which will face a 10 percent tariff, will

not be granted favorable treatment under the USMCA, the senior Trump administration officials said.

Canada and Mexico have been seeking deals with Washington after Trump targeted the United States' immediate neighbors with sharp levies this year.

Trade pressure has been taking a toll on Mexico, with the country's exports of heavy vehicles to the United States falling by nearly 26 percent year-on-year in the January to August period.

Gold price hits new record

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Gold prices have surged to yet another historic peak, reaching Tk 217,381 per bhorti (approximately 11.664 grammes).

The new rate, reflecting an increase of Tk 1,049 per bhorti, is set to come into effect from today, according to an announcement by the Bangladesh Jewellers Association (Bajus) yesterday.

Prices of the precious metal in Bangladesh have been rising steadily, setting new records almost every week. In September alone, the price of 22-carat gold rose by more than Tk 16,000 per bhorti.

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.



Workers pack paddy into sacks after wholesalers bought each maund (around 37 kilograms) for around Tk 1,300 to Tk 1,350 from farmers at a weekly market in Taherpur Pourasava under Bagmara upazila of Rajshahi. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

South Korea urges Bangladesh to ease visa, customs and tariff barriers

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

South Korea wants Bangladesh to have swift and timely visa issuance and renewal procedures, seamless customs clearance, and a reduction of high tariffs on raw materials and intermediate goods as part of improving the business environment.

In order to fully realise Bangladesh's potential as an investment destination, the country also needs to quickly resolve issues centring on overdue dollar payments after the completion of projects and allow the repatriation of profits to home countries.

South Korean Ambassador to Bangladesh Park Young-sik made these comments at a seminar titled "Korean Investors' CSR Activities and Future Together" at a hotel in the capital yesterday.

The Embassy of South Korea, the Korea International Cooperation Agency (Koica), and the Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency organised the event.

The South Korean envoy said South Korea and Bangladesh are currently holding negotiations on a Comprehensive

Economic Partnership Agreement (Cepa), which will help strengthen ties.

Bilateral trade stands at over \$3 billion. Since 1973, at least 144 South Korean companies have participated in 257 infrastructure projects in Bangladesh with a cumulative value of \$8.82 billion as of April 2025.

South Korean companies have contributed to promoting trade and investment and the development of Bangladesh's industry and infrastructure over the decades. Many of them are also involved in various CSR activities, said Young-sik.

He said Bangladesh continues to be a promising destination for South Korean investors because of its rapidly growing economy, strategic location, and abundant labour force.

But to fully realise its potential, Bangladesh needs to improve the business environment, he said.

Bangladesh's exports to South Korea are increasing steadily every year, but the amount is not satisfactory due to the limited range of export items, said Young-sik.

"Items such as footwear, ICT products, leather goods, light industrial products, and pharmaceuticals can be further exported to South Korea," he said.

"A bilateral Cepa can provide an impetus to further increase Bangladesh's share in South Korea's market, especially RMG items," he added.

The envoy said Bangladesh also needs to quickly resolve issues related to overdue dollar payments after the completion of projects

The envoy said Bangladesh needs to develop infrastructure to make its economy sustainable and resilient. South Korea aspires to become a vital partner in Bangladesh's infrastructure development, as it has done in the RMG sector, said Young-sik.

"South Korean enterprises are known for quality delivery and are ready to continue their contribution to infrastructure development," he said.

"However, the Bangladeshi government needs to create an environment for foreign companies to participate in infrastructure projects," he added.

Bangladesh ranks third among South Korea's overseas development assistance recipients, with projects in education, water and sanitation, health, public administration, and transportation.

South Korea is fully committed to strengthening Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) to address trainer shortages, technology gaps, and outdated equipment, with Koica supporting capacity building so that workers are well prepared for future growth.

Young-sik said South Korea is willing to share its development experience with other developing countries but does not pursue strategic interests beyond its economic cooperation.

"Building on the achievements of the past 50 years, both South Korea and Bangladesh are committed to forging a brighter and more prosperous future for our nations," he said.

Ctg port gets 14 gantry cranes

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Red Sea Gateway Terminal (RSGT) Bangladesh Ltd, which runs RSGT Chittagong, an extension of the Chattogram port for handling containers, received the delivery of 10 more gantry cranes last Wednesday, well ahead of schedule, taking the total to 14.

A gantry crane is a heavy-duty lifting machine with a bridge-like structure supported by legs that move on wheels or tracks, allowing it to straddle a workspace to lift and move heavy loads.

Four gantry cranes had arrived at RSGT Chittagong, formerly known as Patenga Container Terminal (PCT), earlier in September.

These custom-built, rubber-tyred gantry cranes from Chinese firm Genma-Kalmar are hybrid vehicles, combining batteries with a diesel generator, and are capable of lifting containers weighing up to 41 tonnes, said a press release.

RSGT Bangladesh Ltd, the country's first foreign container terminal operator and a subsidiary of Saudi company Red Sea Gateway Terminal International, invested \$25 million for the 14 cranes, said officials.

"This investment reflects our strategic vision to modernise Bangladesh's port infrastructure and promote sustainable operational practices," the press release quoted Erwin Haaze, CEO of RSGT Bangladesh, as saying.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

"With these, RSGT Chittagong is setting new benchmarks in productivity, energy efficiency, and environmental responsibility," he said.

The terminal will become fully operational once four under construction ship-to-shore (STS) cranes arrive by the end of the first quarter of 2026, said RSGT Chittagong Head of Commercial and Public Affairs Syed Aref Sarwar.

The STS cranes are large, gantry-style cranes located at the edge of docks, designed to load and unload containers between ships and the shore.

RSGT Chittagong has been partially operational since June 2024, following a 22-year agreement between RSGT Bangladesh Ltd and the Chittagong Port Authority.

In April this year, the terminal started handling import-laden containers after receiving clearance from the National Board of Revenue to set up container scanners.

Competition Commission

FROM PAGE B1

transparency by addressing issues such as abuse of dominance, tying products with services, algorithmic manipulation and leniency.

He, however, said that identifying dominant players must be based on evidence, considering market structure, competition levels and consumer interest.

He also warned that the proposed search powers could lead to harassment and obstruct business growth.

Selim Raihan, an economics professor at Dhaka University, described the amendments as a major step forward, bringing competition laws in line with global standards. "The inclusion of new concepts such as leniency, collective dominance and digital market abuse shows awareness of evolving market dynamics," he said.

He added that establishing an appellate tribunal would strengthen

checks and balances and improve due process, which is not present in the current law.

The expanded search and seizure powers, he said, would enhance the act's operational scope if implemented responsibly.

However, Azhar Uddin Bhuiyan, lecturer at the law department of Dhaka University, said that the amendments expand the commission's discretionary power without adequate oversight.

He said broad definitions, sweeping search powers and a vague leniency system could open the door to arbitrary enforcement.

The amendments do not ensure the commission's accountability," he said, adding that excessive authority could discourage legitimate business cooperation and innovation.

NO JAIL TERMS FOR VIOLATIONS

Akhtaruzzaman Talukder, a member of the Competition

Commission, said critics are mistaken in claiming the amendments dangerously expand its powers.

The system in Bangladesh, he said, remains more relaxed than those of the UK and the US.

He pointed out that, unlike in some countries, the proposed law does not introduce jail terms for competition offences.

"Although the draft may appear stricter, its real impact will depend on how it is implemented," said Talukder.

According to commission data, 34 cases are now under hearing, and 54 verdicts have been delivered since the commission was established.

BCC Chairperson AHM Ahsan said competition laws from India, Pakistan, Indonesia, the United States and the United Kingdom were studied before drafting the proposals.

"The draft will be finalised after consultations at the ministry level," he said.

BBS still relies on paper

FROM PAGE B1

"We are implementing a project with World Bank support that will gradually bring all major surveys under digital platforms," he added.

The DG said plans are also underway to build a "Big Data Platform" to reduce dependence on field surveys and make better use of administrative data from other agencies.

However, Rahman admitted that interoperability and data-sharing standards between departments are still underdeveloped.

"If we could access administrative data from health, education, and other sectors, we would not need to repeat so many surveys," he said.

To strengthen the statistical agency's independence and improve quality, the government has formed a taskforce headed by former caretaker government adviser Hossain Zillur Rahman.

The committee has already submitted its report, recommending reforms to make BBS a more dynamic and autonomous body, Rahman said.

He said BBS has also set up multi-stakeholder expert committees for

each of its six statistical wings to enhance transparency. Once the new system is in place, survey results will no longer require ministerial approval, he added.

Meanwhile, former BBS director general Mohammad Abul Wazed expressed concern over persistent delays in releasing data, especially in agriculture.

He called for a fixed release calendar for all statistical outputs.

"If complex surveys like the Household Income and Expenditure Survey can be published within three months, agricultural data should meet similar timelines," Wazed said.

He also identified staffing shortages as a major challenge, with only half of BBS's posts currently filled. The lack of manpower, he said, undermines supervision and weakens data integrity.

"Reliable statistics are the backbone of good governance," he said. "Without timely and credible data, policy failures are inevitable."

Selim Raihan, executive director of the South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (Sanem), said Bangladesh must go beyond policy

twists to make national data genuinely dependable.

Raihan, who was among the economists on the white paper committee, argued that BBS needs legal and operational autonomy similar to that of central banks.

Such independence, he said, would shield the agency from political influence while ensuring accountability through transparency.

"Autonomy alone is not enough. BBS must also have the tools, skills, and resources to deliver credible data," Raihan said.

The economist also called for a unified national data strategy built on an interoperable digital system linking BBS with all sectoral ministries in real time. Such a platform, he said, would help avoid duplication, promote consistency, and allow government bodies to "speak the same data language."

Raihan also proposed a high-level data governance council under the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) to set standards and resolve discrepancies. "Real-time access is not just about better software; it is about leadership and accountability," he said.

Despite being a high-priority area, the Ministry of Health continues to underperform in development spending.

The Medical Education and Family Welfare Division spent just Tk 1.57 crore, or 0.003 percent of its Tk 4,809 crore allocation, while the Health Services Division disbursed Tk 84 crore, or 1.13 percent of its Tk 7,484 crore allocation.

Economists have long called for increased health sector funding, but the ministry has consistently lagged behind in execution, a trend that persists under the current government.

Other underperforming wings include the Ministry of Railways and the Bridges Division.

Strikes at Ctg port end

FROM PAGE B1

ICD Nemon Container Ltd, said at least 160 TEUs of export-laden containers from their depot missed the scheduled sailings of these five ships.

The delays are expected to ripple through the supply chain, as export cargo unable to reach transshipment ports on time may incur additional costs, including airfreight charges or penalties from buyers.

Nasir Uddin Chowdhury, former first vice president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), said most of the export cargo stranded at the port is unlikely to connect with their mother vessels at transshipment ports, potentially resulting in delays and additional expenses for exporters.

"Buyers in such cases often seek discounts, leaving exporters with little option but to incur extra costs," he added.

Import operations were equally affected. On-chassis delivery of

import containers, where goods are transported directly from the port to the importer's factory, fell drastically.

Sources at the port said only 10-15 TEUs were delivered per day over the three-day disruption, compared to an average of 600-900 TEUs daily. The

The congestion further strained logistics operations and delayed downstream production for multiple industries

sudden suspension of goods-carrying vehicles left factories waiting for critical raw materials and supplies, creating a backlog of over 3,600 TEUs at port yards.

The congestion further strained logistics operations and delayed downstream production for multiple industries.

He urged the government to review the tariff schedule to prevent future operational crises at the port.

Following a meeting with the CPA chairman yesterday afternoon,

transport owners withdrew their strike, allowing cargo operations to gradually resume after 4:00pm. The authority also temporarily suspended the increased fees pending a decision by the CPA board, following instructions from the government.

Shamsuzzaman Suman, president of the Inter-district Truck Covered Van Owners' Association, said he hopes that the government will take a "wise decision" to reinstate the fees at their previous rates. Industry representatives, however, fear that the disruption has already caused substantial financial and logistical damage.

The sudden implementation of the revised port tariff structure caused "chaos in operations," despite objections from businesses, port users, and stakeholders, said SM Abu Tayyab, president of the International Business Forum.

He urged the government to review the tariff schedule to prevent future operational crises at the port.

ADP spending rises

FROM PAGE B1

While the percentage of the allocation spent has increased, the overall amount declined due to lower disbursements in July and August.

Excluding the current and previous fiscal years, average first-quarter ADP implementation over the past five years has hovered around 8 percent.

Foreign aid utilisation continues to lag behind domestic funding.

In the first quarter, project loan spending amounted to Tk 5,074 crore, or 5.90 percent of the allocation, compared to Tk 5,360 crore, or 5.36 percent, last year.

Governments' implementation reached Tk 6,307 crore, down from Tk 6,633 crore a year earlier.

75 percent is concentrated in 15

ministries and divisions.

Among them, the Ministry of Science and Technology leads in implementation, spending 18.14 percent of its allocation — driven largely by the Rooppur nuclear power plant, a priority project for the government.

The Energy and Mineral Resources Division recorded the second highest implementation rate at 9.75 percent, followed by the Ministry of Water Resources at 7.84 percent and the Local Government Division at 7.81 percent.

The interim administration is focusing on rural economic revitalisation and employment generation through increased public investment in these sectors.

Trump extends auto tariff relief

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump signed an order Friday to extend an arrangement that allowed automakers to reduce tariffs paid on imported vehicle parts.

In the same order, released by the White House, he formalized a new 25 percent tariff on imported medium and heavy duty trucks and parts, beginning on November 1.

The announcements came after the Trump administration launched a so-called Section 232 probe into imports of trucks this year to determine their effects on national security.

The president has used such investigations, under the authority of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962, to impose tariffs on various imported goods in efforts to boost domestic manufacturing and punish countries that he says are taking advantage of the United States.

In the same order, Trump formalised a new 25-percent tariff on imported medium and heavy duty trucks and parts, beginning on November 1

Among sectors impacted so far have been steel and aluminum, as well as autos.

But the latest announcement also extends Trump's effort in April to soften tariffs on US automakers.

Companies that import parts for vehicles assembled in the United States are able to offset 3.75 percent of a vehicle's list price, but this offset was due to be reduced after a year and eventually be eliminated.

Friday's order extends the 3.75 percent offset program to 2030, without a reduction in the percentage.

A similar program of offsets is being set up for medium and heavy duty trucks, extending through 2030. Officials said the overall set-up was meant to reward US-based vehicle production.

While imported trucks will soon face a steep duty, senior US officials told journalists that there will still be some favorable treatment linked to the US-Mexico-Canada trade agreement (USMCA).

READ MORE ON B2



Shrimp fry from local hatcheries are cheaper but survive for at best 60 days, when they need around 100 days to reach full size.

PHOTO: MOKAMMEL SHUVO

Debt, disease and weak fry cripple export-oriented shrimp sector

MOKAMMEL SHUVO

Once Bangladesh's second-largest export earner, the shrimp industry now teeters on the brink. The industry was considered the cornerstone of the coastal economy, sustaining millions of livelihoods. But disease, poor fry quality, illegal imports, and climate extremes have thrown the sector into crisis, threatening both farmers and hatchery owners alike.

Take the example of Jagadish Roy of Foria village in Khulna's Paikgacha upazila, who has spent more than 20 years farming bagda, or black tiger, shrimp. Yet, he says, he has never felt secure in this business.

"The fry we buy from local hatcheries are cheaper but of poor quality," he said. "They survive for at best 60 days, but a shrimp needs around 100 days to reach full size. We also face severe shortages of fry when the deep-sea fishing ban is imposed, as no mother shrimp can be collected during that time."

Poor quality fry often carry disease, he added, and many farmers resort to illegally imported shrimp from India to fill the gaps. But these, too, frequently die prematurely, destroying entire ponds and leaving farmers in staggering debt.

"About 90 percent of shrimp farmers in our area are in debt," Roy said. "The land here isn't suitable for anything other than shrimp farming, so we can't leave it. When one farmer goes bankrupt, another takes over, but everyone remains burdened with loans."

Virus attacks, he explained, often strike when shrimp shed their shells at 30-35 days, wiping out months of labour and investment in a single blow.

Jagadish's struggle is echoed across the southwest coast. Shrimp fry produced in Cox's Bazar supply the farms of Khulna, Satkhira, and Bagerhat. Coastal salinity makes the district ideal for hatcheries, yet the sector there is shrinking. Where once about 60 hatcheries operated, only 25-30 remain.

"If I quit now, I'd be left with around Tk

5 crore in debt," said Zakir Ullah, managing director of a Cox's Bazar hatchery. "We sell 1,000 shrimp fry for Tk 250 on average, but our production cost is around Tk 300. We continue only to avoid bankruptcy."

Many of the original hatchery owners have left the business, leaving it to renters. Harunur Rashid, managing director of Belie Hatchery in Kolatoli, said the exit of experienced operators has coincided with falling demand. "Many farmers, overwhelmed by debt, have quit farming," he said. "Exports have also dropped, pushing prices down further."

The deep sea fishing ban, spanning June and July, compounds these challenges. During this period, no vessels can collect mother shrimp, halting the production of local fry.

Shrimp exports, which peaked at \$550 million in FY14, fell sharply before a modest recovery of 19 percent in FY25 to \$296 million

Salehin Rahman Mohian, executive member of the Shrimp Hatchery Association of Bangladesh and director of Niribili Hatchery, explained that hatchery owners often sit idle during the peak season. "Some hatcheries import larvae from Indian nurseries," he added. "These illegal imports are often of poor quality and cause heavy losses for farmers."

SM Babor, office secretary of the Shrimp Hatchery Association of Bangladesh, said Cox's Bazar produces around 700-800 crore shrimp fry annually. "At one point, there were 58 hatcheries here. Now only 25-30 remain," he said, noting that 25-30 new hatcheries have emerged in Satkhira, using seawater transported by trawlers.

The management of hatcheries is further complicated by weak broodstock practices and occasional fraud.

Cox's Bazar District Fisheries Officer

Nazmul Huda described the situation as "very complex." Pond water temperatures on the southwest coast rise to 37°C-44°C from April to June, creating conditions unsuitable for shrimp. Silt accumulation reduces pond depth, while disease outbreaks are frequent. "Some hatcheries import fake nauplii, nurse them, and sell them as local fry."

During the fishing ban, fisheries officials monitor hatcheries in Cox's Bazar and Satkhira to prevent the illegal nursing of post-larvae. "If any hatchery is found with post-larvae brought in illegally, we destroy them immediately," Huda said.

Despite this, complaints persist about secret nursing, as some traders attempt to meet the high demand for fry during the ban period.

Across the coastal districts, about 30 lakh people are directly involved in shrimp farming, hatcheries, and processing, with another 20 lakh indirectly dependent on the sector. Yet production has fallen sharply over the past decade.

Between 2010 and 2014, Bangladesh produced 120,000 to 133,000 tonnes of bagda shrimp; by 2020, this had dropped to 42,000 tonnes. Shrimp exports, which peaked at \$550 million in FY2014, fell sharply before a modest recovery of 19 percent in FY2024-25 to \$296 million.

In July 2025, exports rose 47 percent year-on-year to \$31 million, but industry insiders note that this reflects stronger prices and a higher US dollar, rather than a meaningful increase in output.

Industry insiders emphasize that the challenges are structural as much as financial. "Due to repeated policy mistakes, the shrimp industry is collapsing," Mohian said.

He added, "Bangladesh lost global market share in vannamei shrimp because of delays in policy approval. Now European buyers are showing renewed interest in bagda shrimp for its taste, so the government should step in to ensure quality fry, medicine, and feed to boost production and export earnings."

A 90-day plan for citizen service integration

M MANJUR MAHMUD

For years, citizens in Bangladesh have struggled with a fragmented and inefficient system for obtaining vital documents. Birth certificates, national ID (NID) cards, and passports exist as isolated "islands of information", each operating independently and often redundantly. This fragmented system has created a frustrating bureaucratic maze that wastes time and public resources while eroding citizen trust. Having worked in the ID field for 35 years, both locally and internationally, I have seen how this lack of integration causes duplication, delays, and disillusionment.

Yet, integration is not an impossible dream. With focus, political will, and a well-structured plan, it is entirely achievable within 90 days. The challenge is not primarily technological; it lies in coordination, governance, and legal preparedness. By acting decisively, Bangladesh can build a modern, citizen-centric identity ecosystem that serves people efficiently and transparently.

The first 30 days should focus on establishing a strong governance foundation. This phase is crucial because technology without governance leads to confusion, not progress. The government has already recognised the need for integration, but a dedicated, high-level taskforce must now take the lead. This taskforce should include representatives from key ministries such as Home Affairs, the Election Commission, Finance, and the ICT Division. Its primary responsibility would be to design a comprehensive legal and regulatory framework that allows safe and lawful data sharing among agencies.

A Personal Data Protection Act should be drafted during this phase, along with detailed data-sharing policies. These policies must clearly identify which agencies are authorised to access or exchange specific information, under what conditions, and for what purposes. Equally important is the standardisation of data formats. A universal schema for critical fields such as name spelling, parentage, and date of birth

must be adopted to prevent mismatches that currently plague these systems. When citizens know their personal data is being handled under a clear and transparent legal structure, confidence in the system will grow.

The next 30 days should be dedicated to building the technical architecture. The goal is not to merge or replace existing databases but to link

them intelligently through a secure and flexible middleware layer, often referred to as a National Connectivity Bus or API system. This architecture would allow real-time data exchange without physically moving the data, ensuring both efficiency and security. The NID number would serve as the unique identifier for every eligible citizen, while the birth registration number (BRN) would remain the foundational identifier for children and those not yet eligible for NID.

A central registry would securely map the BRN to NID and passport numbers, ensuring data accuracy and protecting integrity through read-only access for government agencies. Tokenisation and encryption should form the core of this architecture, guaranteeing data security while allowing scalability for future e-government services. The final 30 days should be dedicated to testing, deployment, and public engagement. A carefully chosen pilot programme, perhaps in one district, would demonstrate the system's benefits. Citizens in that area could apply for or renew passports using only their NID numbers. The system would automatically verify birth registration details, eliminating the need for manual submission of multiple documents.

Success in the pilot phase should be measured by clear indicators such as shorter processing times, fewer errors, and higher user satisfaction. Alongside the technical work, a nationwide public awareness campaign must explain the new process and reassure citizens about data security. Equally important is training thousands of government officials so they can confidently and accurately operate the new system. A well-trained workforce will be key to ensuring the change is smooth, sustainable, and genuinely beneficial.

This 90-day roadmap is ambitious but realistic. By combining a sound legal framework with strong technical design and citizen-focused implementation, Bangladesh can finally bridge its islands of information. The result would be a seamless, trusted, and efficient identity system that reflects a government ready to serve its citizens in the digital age. The time to act is now.

The writer is the president of DataSoft Systems Bangladesh Limited

US-China trade war risks long-term hit to global growth: WTO

REUTERS, Washington

The head of the World Trade Organization said she is urging the US and China to de-escalate trade tensions, warning that a decoupling by the world's two largest economies could reduce global economic output by 7 percent over the longer term.

WTO Director General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala told Reuters in an interview the global trade body was extremely concerned about the latest spike in US-China trade tensions and had spoken with officials from both countries to encourage more dialogue.

"We're obviously worried at any escalation of US-China tensions," she said, noting the two sides had backed away from their first tariff escalation earlier this year, averting more serious consequences and she hoped that would happen again.

"Similarly, we are really hoping that the two sides will come together and they will de-escalate, because any US-China tensions and US-China decoupling (would) have implications not just for the two biggest economies in the world, but also for the rest of the world," she said.

Both sides, Okonjo-Iweala said, understand the importance of good relations, given the implications for the global economy and other countries.

Any kind of decoupling that divides the world into

READE MORE ON B2

High gold prices change festive buying patterns in India

REUTERS, Mumbai

Soaring gold prices led Indian buyers to choose coins and bars over jewellery during the Dhanteras festival on Saturday, fuelled by hopes that the precious metal's glittering rally would continue, industry officials told Reuters.

Dhanteras, which marks the start of the five day Diwali festival of lights, is considered auspicious for buying gold and is one of the busiest gold-buying days in the world's second-biggest consumer of the metal.

Overall gold sales during Dhanteras were 10-15 percent lower in volume terms compared to last year, but total value rose sharply due to higher prices, said Rajesh Rokde, chairman of the All India Gem and Jewellery Domestic Council.

"Gold jewellery demand took a hit with record-high prices, dropping nearly 30 percent from last year, but coins and bars were flying off the shelves," Surendra Mehta, secretary at the India Bullion and Jewellers Association, said.

In India, buyers typically pay 10-20 percent of the gold price as manufacturing charges for jewellery, making it even more



Shopkeepers await customers at a gold jewellery shop in Srinagar. Facing record price surges, the industry is offering healthy discounts on jewellery making to maintain strong gold-buying interest.

PHOTO: AFP/FILE

NSE Nifty 50 share index has risen about 5 percent during the period.

Facing record price surges, the industry is offering healthy discounts on jewellery making to maintain strong gold-buying interest throughout the festive and upcoming wedding seasons, said Sachin Jain, CEO of the World Gold Council's Indian operations.

Indian dealers were this week quoting a premium of up to \$25 per ounce over official domestic prices, inclusive of 6 percent import and 3 percent sales levies, the highest in more than a decade.

Demand for silver coins, bars and jewellery meanwhile was strong this year, driven by the metal's stellar price rally, said Saurabh Gadgil, chairman of PNG Jewellers. Investors believe silver could outperform gold, dealers said.

Higher returns from precious metals have been attracting strong inflows into physically backed gold and silver exchange traded funds in recent months.

"With jewellery stores open till midnight and Dhanteras continuing into tomorrow afternoon, we expect buying momentum to carry forward," said Rokde of GJC.