Star BUSINESS

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Apart from concerns over data accuracy, the outdated system causes several setbacks.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

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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Strikes at Ctg port end but leave scars

Ships leave half-empty, import deliveries fall

DWAIPAYAN BARUA, *Ctg*

Operations at the country's main trade gateway faced significant disruption following a series of wildcat transport strikes and work abstentions, which ended yesterday, leaving hundreds of export containers stranded, ships departing half-empty, and import deliveries falling to a trickle.

According to port sources, over 3,600 TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent unit) of import containers accumulated at port yards as the unrest brought normal cargo movement to a near halt, affecting traders and the wider supply chain.

Khairul Alam Suzan, former vice president of Bangladesh Freight Forwarders Association, said the import backlog is expected to be cleared within two-three days if delivery resumes smoothly as the daily delivery capacity can go up to 5,000 TEUs.

"However, the backlog of export containers might take longer, and if not resolved shortly, this might portray a bad image of the port operations," he added.

The disruption began last week when owners of container-carrying prime mover trailers partially halted operations on Wednesday afternoon following a sudden fourfold increase in port entry fees by the Chittagong Port Authority (CPA).

The regulatory body raised charges, as per the recently revised tariff schedule, for heavy vehicles, including trucks, covered vans, and prime mover trailers, from Tk 57.50 to Tk 230 per vehicle — a 300 percent hike.

Light vehicle fees were also increased from Tk 23 to Tk 115 per vehicle, while licence fees were raised, prompting widespread opposition from transport owners and stakeholders.

Truck and covered van owners escalated the protest on Saturday morning, joining the ongoing strike and effectively halting the movement of all types of cargo to and from the port.

The situation worsened yesterday when customs clearing and forwarding (C&F) staff enforced a four-hour work abstention from 9:00am, protesting the increased entry fees for light vehicles and higher license charges. As a result, normal cargo operations remained suspended for at least 35 hours.

The impact on exports was immediate and severe. A total of 944 TEUs of export containers missed their scheduled sailings, forcing five vessels, including the Colombo-bound Sol Resilience, to depart without them.

The Sol Resilience alone left 170 TEUs behind, according to Muntasir Rubayat, head of operations at the ship's local agent, GBX Logistics.

Rubayat said the vessel could not defer departure as it had already been berthed at the jetty for three days and needed to maintain its schedule to connect with the mother vessel at Colombo by October 24.

Other depots reported similar losses. AKM Abdul Hadi, operations manager of

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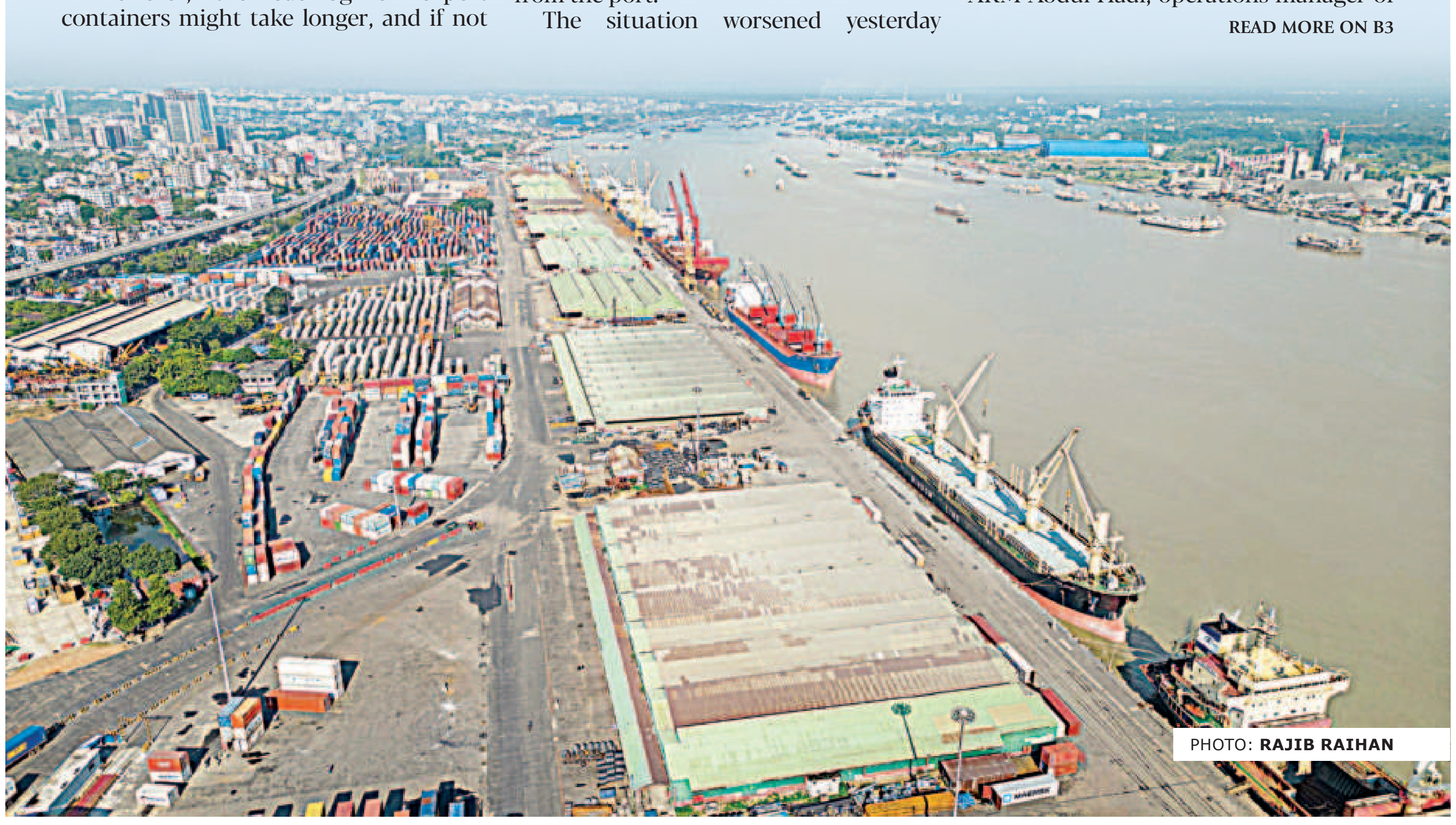

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

BSRM to invest Tk 200cr to expand wire business

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

BSRM Ltd, Bangladesh's leading steel manufacturer, is boosting its wire production with a Tk 200 crore investment in its subsidiary, BSRM Wires Limited.

The company's board approved the investment yesterday, aiming to strengthen the production of high-quality wires used in construction, power transmission, and fencing.

The investment will support the manufacturing of LRPC wires (steel wires used to reinforce concrete railway sleepers), ACSR core wires (steel-core wires that strengthen aluminum power cables), electrodes, and chain-link fences, according to a disclosure on the Dhaka Stock Exchange website.

BSRM's plans also include a large wire rod pickling station and a state-of-the-art fasteners plant for bolts and nuts.

Furthermore, the BSRM board decided to provide a 50 percent cash dividend for the year that ended on June 30, 2025, depending on the company's record profits. In the previous year, it provided a cash dividend of 35 percent.

Its profits surged 42 percent year-on-year to Tk 614 crore in the last fiscal year. The steel company reported that its consolidated earnings per share were Tk 20.6, up from Tk 14.5 in the previous year.

Its stocks rose around 4 percent to Tk 87.20 yesterday at the DSE.

In the broader cable sector, BBS Cables, one of the leading cable producers in Bangladesh, said in its 2023-24 report that Bangladesh's cable market is expected to grow rapidly, driven by technological progress and a shift away from imported products.

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 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 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 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 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 CHANGES RECEIVE CAUTIONARY WELCOME

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

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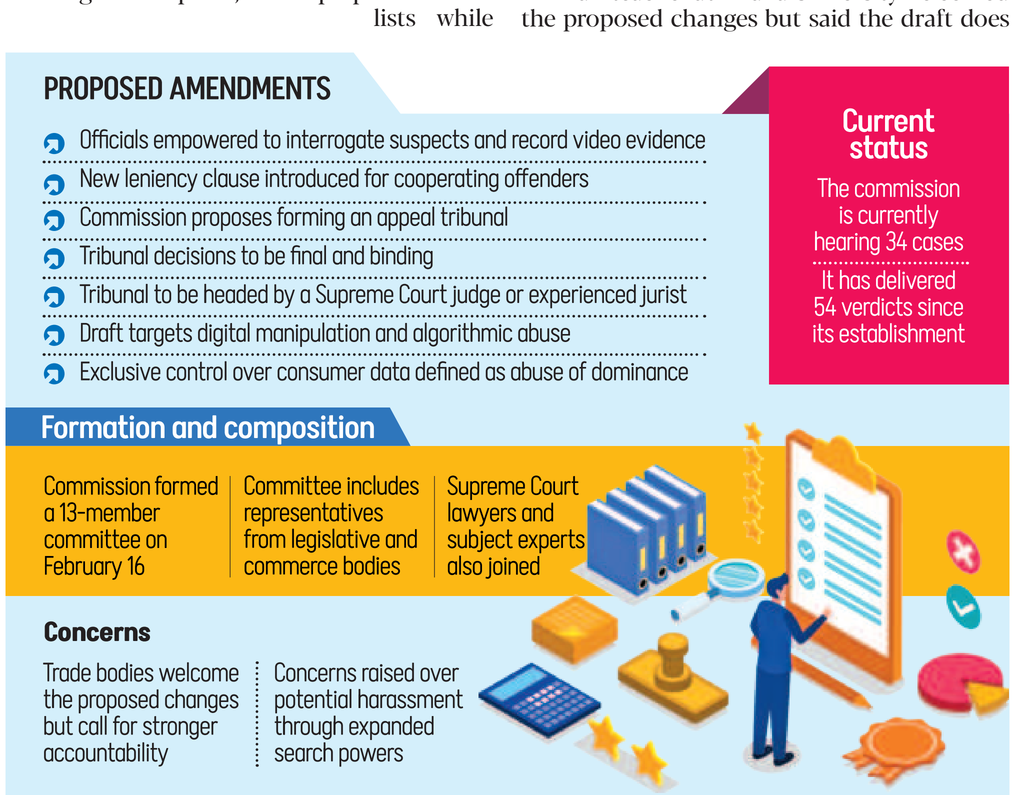
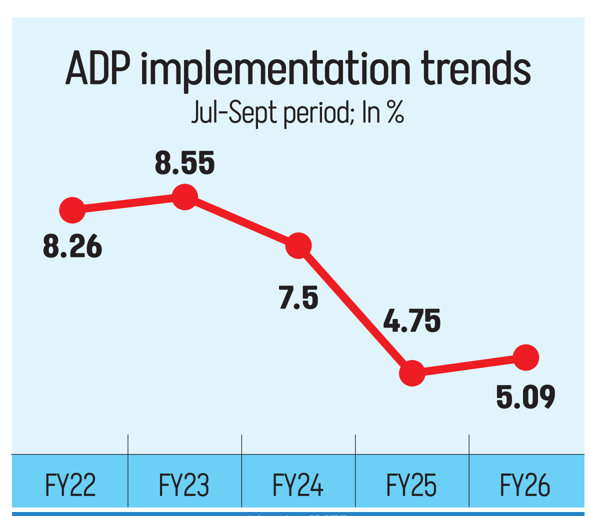


ADP spending rises in Sept

But overall implementation remains sluggish



STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh's development expenditure under the Annual Development Programme (ADP) rose 6 percent year-on-year in September after the planning ministry laid emphasis on accelerating its implementation.

According to the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED), ADP spending reached Tk 6,443 crore last month, up from Tk 6,072 crore in the same period of the last fiscal year.

In spite of the interim government's commitment to boost development outlays, execution has been slow.

In July, ADP implementation fell to nearly 50 percent, and August saw a similar decline.

In response, Planning Adviser Prof Wahiduddin Mahmud convened a meeting with senior officials across ministries and divisions, urging them to expedite project execution.

An IMED official said the adviser's intervention had led to a modest uptick in spending, but implementation has yet to return to normal levels.

In the first quarter of the current fiscal year, ADP implementation stood at Tk 12,158 crore, equivalent to 5.09 percent of the total allocation. This compares to Tk 13,215 crore, or 4.75 percent of the allocation, in the same period last year.

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