

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.

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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).

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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 Paikgachha 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

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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

expensive than buying gold coins.

Local gold prices closed at 127,008 rupees per 10 grams on Friday after

hitting a record high of 132,294 rupees, marking an increase of more than 60 percent since last year's Dhanteras. India's

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.