BGMEA chief clarifies remark on meeting with CA

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Mahmud Hasan Khan, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), yesterday clarified his earlier remark about being unable to get an appointment with the chief adviser for four months.

He made the clarification after the chief adviser's deputy press secretary, Azad Majumder, in a Facebook post, said that "the BGMEA president expressed his frustration yesterday, saying he could not meet the chief adviser."

"However, just a few days ago, I personally saw him attending a meeting chaired by the chief adviser on preparations for Bangladesh's LDC graduation. Not only was he present, but he also directly raised several concerns of the BGMEA during that meeting," Majumder wrote in the post.

When contacted by The Daily Star over the phone, Khan said the meeting Majumder referred to was related to Bangladesh's LDC graduation deferment and was attended by nearly 100 businesspeople, bureaucrats, and government officials.

"We wanted an exclusive meeting with the chief adviser for leaders of the garment and textile sectors," Khan said.

"The chief adviser has not given us time for four months; that is the reality," he added.

At a press conference on Tuesday, the BGMEA president said, "For four months since taking office, we have repeatedly requested appointments with the honourable chief adviser to share our concerns, but he has not given us any time."

Unilever Consumer Care profit rises 10% in Jan-Sept

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Unilever Consumer Care reported a 10 percent year-on-year rise in profit for January-September, buoyed by higher finance income, with earnings nearly matching its full-year result in 2024.

The multinational fast-moving consumer goods company posted Tk 62.80 crore in profit for the nine months, compared with Tk 66.72 crore for the whole of last year, according to its financial statements.

Earnings per share stood at Tk 32.59, up from Tk 29.70 a year earlier. The company attributed the improvement to operating efficiency and stronger returns from cash investments, which lifted net finance income.

Revenue rose 10 percent to Tk 275.87 crore during the period.

However, its cash flow weakened as the company settled all outstanding Usance Payable at Sight (UPAS) letters of credit without availing new facilities, leading to higher outflows than the operating profit generated.

UPAS is a type of letter of credit that lets exporters receive immediate payment, while importers repay banks later under deferred credit terms.

Unilever Consumer Care said its net asset value per share fell due to payment of the FY2024 dividend, which was declared and disbursed by June 2025.

According to local officials, the greater Rangpur region had only 40 orange and malta orchards a decade ago, but the number has now risen to about 240.
PHOTO: S DILIP ROY

Greater Rangpur witnesses surge in malta, orange cultivation

S DILIP ROY

In the northern districts of Rangpur, Lalmonirhat, Kurigram, Gaibandha, and Nilphamari, orchards once dominated by mango, banana, and litchi are now increasingly filled with malta and orange trees. Green maltas and bright oranges are becoming a common sight, signalling an agricultural shift that is boosting incomes for growers and offering cheaper fruits to local consumers.

According to local officials, the greater Rangpur region had only 40 orange and malta orchards a decade ago. Currently, it has about 240, accommodating roughly 240,000 trees of China, Darjeeling Mandarin, and Darjeeling Nagpuri varieties. Each tree produces 40 to 50 kilogrammes of fruit annually. After accounting for production costs, farmers earn around 60 percent profit.

The growth is striking compared with a decade ago. According to Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) data, in the fiscal year (FY) 2014-15, Rangpur, Gaibandha, and Nilphamari did not cultivate any oranges or maltas. Kurigram and Lalmonirhat produced 16 tonnes of oranges and 10 tonnes of malta. In the fiscal year 2022-23, the region produced 159 tonnes of oranges on 18 hectares and 3,903 tonnes of malta on 315 hectares.

Rangpur district alone produced 2,600 tonnes of malta on 130 hectares and 32 tonnes of oranges on two hectares in FY23.

Enamul Haque, a grower from Ulipur upazila in Kurigram, planted 2,800 trees on eight acres eight years ago. "I sell malta at Tk 60-Tk 70 a kilogramme (kg) and oranges at Tk 90-Tk 100 directly from my orchard," he said. "Traders come from distant places to buy the fruits."

Enamul spends around Tk 15-Tk 20 lakh annually on maintenance and labour but earns over Tk 1 crore in sales. He also grows ginger in sacks under the fruit trees for additional income.

In Lalmonirhat's Barakhata village, Khalilur Rahman has been cultivating oranges for a decade. With 450 trees on five bighas of land, he now earns Tk 6 lakh-Tk 7 lakh every year. "I take care of my orchard myself, so costs are low. Orange farming has made me self-reliant," he said.

In Madhupur village under Kaunia upazila of Rangpur, Nagen Chandra Sen began commercial orange cultivation in 2019 with 150 trees. "I've already made a profit, and other farmers are showing interest," he said.

His neighbour, Monoranjan Sen, has planted malta and orange trees on three acres of land. "The trees have matured and will bear fruit next year," he said. "It takes a lot of capital to start an orchard. Many farmers want to try but can't afford the initial investment."

The boom has not only benefited growers but also consumers and traders.

At Rangpur's CO Bazar, fruit trader Sofiar Rahman said, "We buy oranges at Tk 90-Tk 100 a kg and malta at Tk 60-Tk 70 from local orchards. After selling in retail, we make Tk 15-Tk 20 profit per kg. Since these fruits are cheaper than imported ones, demand is growing."

In the BDR Gate area of Lalmonirhat town, Arsad Hossain, another trader, said, "I make Tk 10-Tk 15 profit per kg. Because the prices are lower, sales have increased."

For consumers, the local produce offers relief from soaring fruit prices.

Haripada Roy, a schoolteacher from Rangpur city, said, "Imported oranges cost Tk 250-Tk 300 a kg, while locally grown ones are available for Tk 100-Tk 130. The size is smaller, but the taste is almost the same."

Nazir Ali, a rickshaw-puller from Mahiganj, echoed the sentiment, saying, "If local fruits weren't available, we couldn't afford imported ones. Now we can finally buy oranges and malta for our families."

Officials say the region's success story began with a few hobbyist farmers.

"Eight to ten years ago, commercial malta and orange cultivation in Rangpur was just a dream," said Sirajul Islam, additional director of the DAE's Rangpur regional office. "Some farmers planted trees in their homesteads and succeeded. Inspired by them, many others have now set up commercial orchards."

He added that the DAE is offering training and technical assistance to farmers to improve fruit quality and expand production.

About 70 percent of the locally produced malta and oranges are sold within the region, with the remaining 30 percent sent to other parts of the country.

While Rangpur is witnessing growth in both malta and orange cultivation, at the national level, orange production has fallen over the same period. However, malta has gained immense popularity across the country.

In FY15, Bangladesh produced 39,046 tonnes of oranges on 4,154 hectares and 3,916 tonnes of malta on 555 hectares. By FY23, orange production had declined to 21,303 tonnes on 2,633 hectares, while malta production surged to 69,981 tonnes on 6,921 hectares.

Outside Rangpur, Rangamati produced 12,326 tonnes of malta on 1,262 hectares and 14,801 tonnes of oranges on 1,566 hectares, with Bandarban leading cultivation in both categories. Barishal also produced 10,879 tonnes of malta in FY23.

Rebuilding confidence in non-banks

MANWAR HOSSAIN

Across the world, financial sectors have faced collapse and come back stronger. The United States rebuilt trust after the savings and Loan crisis of the 1980s. India restored confidence in its non-bank financial companies through governance reform and liquidity support. In Bangladesh, Pubali Bank, City Bank and Eastern Bank once struggled but reinvented themselves through strong management and transparent governance.

The lesson is universal. Financial institutions face crises because their business involves taking risks and managing uncertainty. They recover when central banks provide structured support and a clear path forward, not prolonged uncertainty.

Non-bank financial institutions (NBFIs) in Bangladesh currently suffer from both liquidity shortages and a credibility crisis. The absence of reliable, standardised data has led to name-based lending, where credit decisions rely on reputation rather than evidence. A large share of today's non-performing loans (NLPs) was inherited from a time when credible data was scarce. Some institutions also engaged in internal borrowing, which needs separate treatment based on accountability, not collective punishment.

The Bangladesh Bank (BB) has a chance to restore confidence and modernise the industry through a three-step framework of evaluation, structured liquidity and incentivised recovery.

Each NBFI should present a 10-year revival plan detailing cash-flow forecasts, governance reforms and credit-rating improvements. Based on these, BB could identify which institutions merit support. For viable ones, the bank could extend conditional liquidity assistance tied to clear performance targets. A central bank representative could sit on each board as a non-voting observer, ensuring accountability and discipline.

The central bank could also enable partnerships between commercial banks with surplus liquidity and well-governed NBFIs. Under this model, a bank could lend to an NBFI backed by a central bank guarantee. Representatives from both could serve as observers until the facility is repaid. This would link liquidity with participation and align accountability with capital. The lending and borrowing relationship must remain strictly that of creditor and borrower, regardless of ownership ties. Such a mechanism would allow Bangladesh to address financial challenges using its own resources, channelling surplus liquidity into productive sectors and supporting growth.

For the framework to succeed, BB and the finance ministry must encourage participation. Two incentives could help: income tax relief for banks on interest earned from funds extended to NBFIs, and a five-year tax waiver on long-term retail deposits placed in NBFIs. Though these may reduce short-term revenue, they would strengthen the financial system in the long term by boosting credit flow and business activity.

Another measure could ease liquidity pressure. The central bank could allow verified transfers of term deposits between depositors, enabling one investor to assign their deposit to another under regulatory oversight and with a minimum three-year term. This would preserve liquidity while offering flexibility. Similar instruments exist in the United States, Singapore, India and Sri Lanka. Controlled transfer systems can build trust without destabilising institutions. Within a few years, this could stabilise deposits and reduce panic withdrawals without new capital injections.

The approach mirrors successful examples abroad. India's HDFC was revived through structured refinancing and regulatory trust. Malaysia's Danaharta combined asset resolution with governance reform. Indonesia and South Korea created stabilisation funds to manage bad assets and support viable players. In every case, central banks acted early to rebuild trust before contagion spread. In Bangladesh, such contagion has already weakened the NBFI sector.

The central bank has taken a more reform-oriented approach. Earlier this year, it formed a Policy Support Committee to evaluate borrowers affected by external shocks such as currency devaluation, global supply disruption and the Russia-Ukraine war. The committee recommends restructuring or policy relief where warranted, showing that the central bank is no longer a passive observer but an active participant in stabilising viable institutions.

BB appears to be moving in the right direction, but time is crucial. Swift, structured action that combines evaluation, incentives and oversight can turn the NBFI sector into a pillar of industrial and housing finance. Institutions that now face uncertainty could soon drive growth, just as Pubali, City and Eastern Bank once did.

Revival is not a dream but a design. It means learning from history and trusting in the future of responsible enterprise.

The writer is chairman of Anwar Group of Industries

Stocks snap three-day slump, turnover rises 11%

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Dhaka stocks closed higher yesterday, snapping a three-day losing streak as gains in engineering and pharmaceuticals lifted the indices alongside stronger turnover.

The DSEX, the benchmark index of the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE), rose 8.26 points, or 0.16 percent, to close at 5,092.39, according to DSE data. Other indices also followed the positive trend of the main index, as the Shariah-based DSES and the blue-chip DS30 edged higher.

"The market closed in the green, with large-cap sectors posting a mixed performance," BRAC EPL Stock Brokerage Ltd said in its daily market update.

Turnover, a key indicator of investor activity, rose 11 percent to Tk 503 crore, reflecting improved investor sentiment amid the market recovery.

Among the major sectors, engineering registered the highest gain at 0.83 percent, followed by pharmaceuticals, fuel and power, and food and allied.

Bank shares fell 0.24 percent, followed by those in telecommunications and non-bank financial institutions.

Block trades—high-volume transactions involving large numbers of securities—accounted for 4.8 percent of the overall market turnover.

Market breadth was mixed, with 175 scrips advancing, 153 declining, and 66 remaining unchanged.

Orion Infusion emerged as the most traded stock, posting a turnover of Tk 19.2 crore, according to BRAC EPL. First Finance surged 10 percent to top the gainers' list, while Stylecraft dropped 13.82 percent, becoming the worst performer of the session.

Snowtex eyes $160m exports to France in five years

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Snowtex Group, a Bangladeshi apparel manufacturer and exporter, aims to export goods worth $150 million to $160 million to the French market over the next five years.

Bangladesh's trade with France exceeded $2.2 billion last year, with Snowtex contributing more than $100 million, said Md Tariqul Islam, assistant director for marketing and merchandising at Snowtex Group, yesterday following a visit to the Snowtex factory in Dhamrai by French Ambassador-designate to Bangladesh Jean-Marc Séré-Charlet.

"Over the past few years, our annual growth in the French market has been between 15 percent and 20 percent, reaching around $110 million to $115 million annually," he said.

"We are optimistic that the future will be even better, and we expect 10 percent to 15 percent growth each year," he added.

The ambassador visited Snowtex Outerwear Ltd and Snowtex Sportswear Ltd, where 20,000 people work to produce about 30 million outerwear pieces annually.

Snowtex began exporting to France in late 2014, mainly outerwear products such as jackets and sports or hiking apparel, Islam said.

"To expand further in the French market, our main goals are to strengthen relationships, offer better prices, and ensure shorter lead times," he said, adding that even with strong relationships, business continuity depends on competitiveness.

French Ambassador-designate to Bangladesh Jean-Marc Séré-Charlet visiting the Snowtex factory in Dhamrai yesterday.
PHOTO: COLLECTED

"Until now, we have produced mostly basic products. Now we must move toward high-end manufacturing and greater efficiency. His visit was highly motivating for us," he added.

Snowtex Group exports apparel worth $300 million annually to the US and other countries across Asia and Europe.

Currently, the company has a workforce of about 23,000.

Ambassador-designate Séré-Charlet said, "This is my first visit to a ready-made garment factory, and I'm very pleased."

He said French companies invest in Bangladesh because they believe in the ability of Bangladeshi workers to produce high-quality goods for the French market.

He added that there is a strong commitment to both product quality and workers' well-being, and what he saw was very promising for the continued development of ties between France and Bangladesh.

He also said France is among the largest importers of ready-made garments from Bangladesh and hopes to further strengthen the partnership and cooperation in the coming years.