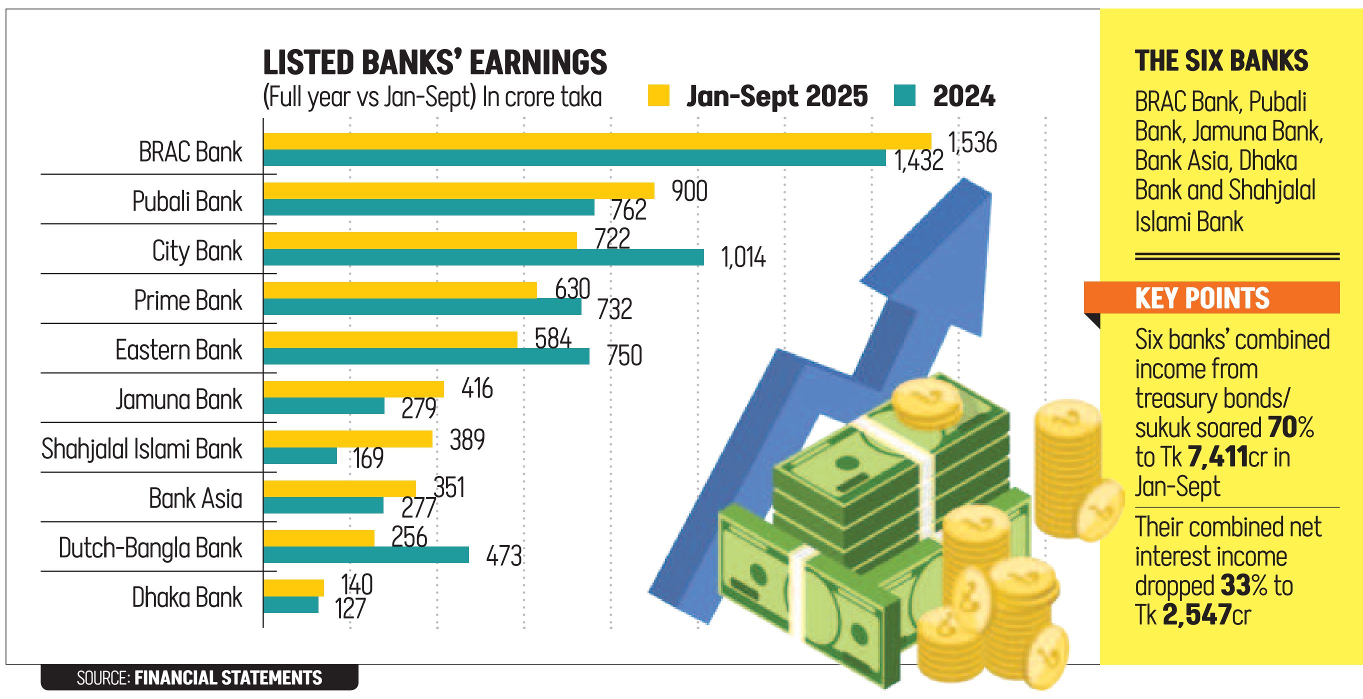
DHAKA FRIDAY OCTOBER 31, 2025, KARTIK 15, 1432 BS ● starbusiness@thedailystar.net

Star BUSINESS

Nine-month profits by six banks surpass full-year gains

High returns from treasury bills lift profits despite rough market

AHSAN HABIB *and* FEDA AL HOSSAIN



SOURCE: FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

How has business been this year? Most commercial banks would probably say that it has been a struggle just to stay afloat amid financial turmoil, falling appetite for credit, and a surge in bad loans.

Yet six commercial lenders have bucked the trend. Their profits in the first nine months of 2025 have already beaten their total gains from last year, thanks mainly to strong returns from treasury bills and bonds.

The performance comes as a surprise to their peers and breaks the familiar pattern of Islami Bank, the country's largest shariah-based lender, consistently logging the highest profit growth.

The six banks are BRAC Bank, Pubali Bank, Jamuna Bank, Bank Asia, Shahjalal Islami Bank, and Dhaka Bank.

Some other banks, like Eastern Bank, Prime Bank, and City Bank -- which were marked as sustainable banks by the central bank, also recorded handsome profit growth over the nine-month period.

Meanwhile, Islami Bank managed to stay in the black, posting a profit of Tk 99 crore, down from Tk 108 crore in the same period last year.

The performance breaks the familiar pattern of Islami Bank, the country's largest shariah-based lender, consistently logging the highest profit growth

Though returns from treasury bills and bonds helped the six banks lift their profits, their interest income from lending, the heart of the banking business, has fallen.

Combined, these banks earned Tk 7,411 crore from investments, mostly in treasury bonds, a roughly 70 percent increase from the previous year. At the same time, their net interest income fell 33 percent to Tk 2,547 crore.

"The banking market is highly skewed, so profits vary widely," said Shah Md Ahsan Habib, professor at the Bangladesh Institute of Bank Management (BIBM).

He added the situation worsened after the political changeover last year, following which several banks fell under the scanner and their long-buried bad debts got exposed subsequently.

Distressed loans at banks rose 59 percent to a record Tk 756,526 crore in 2024, exposing the fragile state of the financial sector. These loans accounted for 45 percent of total outstanding loans, roughly Tk 1,682,878 crore, close to the national budget for fiscal year 2025-26.

Among distressed assets, defaulted loans reached Tk 345,765 crore, rescheduled loans Tk 348,461 crore, and written-off loans Tk 62,300 crore, according to the Bangladesh Bank (BB).

"Deposits shifted from weaker banks to better-managed ones. Well-governed banks attracted higher deposits, but the overall business environment remains uncertain," said BIBM Prof Habib.

He said some entrepreneurs closed factories or left the market, pushing down overall demand for credit. Banks, in turn, have been cautious with lending and focused on recovering loans.

BB data for the first two months of the current fiscal year show credit to the private sector rose just 6.35 percent, the slowest in more than two decades.

"With limited demand for loans and a shallow bond market, banks have turned to treasury bonds to protect their bottom line," Prof Habib said.

"Although banks are earning from treasury investments, we expect them to support lending and industry to boost GDP growth."

Among the top performers, BRAC Bank led the group with a nine-month profit of Tk 1,536 crore, up from Tk 1,432 crore in 2024. The bank attributed the rise to stronger investment income and higher deposit mobilisation, though loan growth remained subdued.

Pubali Bank posted Tk 900 crore, up from Tk 762 crore.

Pubali Bank Managing Director Mohammad Ali said the bank's asset quality improved over the past nine months and returns from government securities were healthy.

He also noted that income from international business was good amid signs of economic stabilisation.

Jamuna Bank earned Tk 416 crore, compared with Tk 279 crore in 2024. Its statements attributed the rise to higher investment and other operating income.

Bank Asia recorded Tk 351 crore, up from Tk 277 crore, with operating profits supported by nearly doubled investment income, which rose to Tk 1,930 crore from Tk 979 crore.

Shahjalal Islami Bank reported Tk 389 crore, up from Tk 169 crore.

Managing Director Mosleh Uddin Ahmed cited three factors behind the increase. Those are stable deposit costs, controlled operating expenses, and higher investment returns.

He also highlighted gains in the export-import business and projected healthy future growth, especially in garment-related trade.

Dhaka Bank earned Tk 140 crore, surpassing its 2024 total of Tk 127 crore. The bank mentioned lower operating profits but improved cash flow due to higher customer deposits during the past nine months.

Other banks saw profits in the first nine months, though they have yet to surpass their full-year 2024 earnings.

Profit by Eastern Bank grew 26 percent year-on-year to Tk 584 crore. In the past nine months, Prime Bank posted Tk 630 crore compared with Tk 732 crore last year.

City Bank reported Tk 722 crore and Dutch-Bangla Bank Tk 256 crore profits in the first nine months of this year.

Foreign loan pledges jump 33 times; still below IMF ceiling

REJAUL KARIM BYRON *and* AHSAN HABIB

Bangladesh's fresh foreign loan commitments soared by more than 33 times in the first quarter of the current fiscal year (FY), although the amount still remains well below the borrowing ceiling recently set by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Between July and September of FY2025-26, the government secured commitments worth $911 million, compared to just $27 million during the same period a year earlier, according to data from the Economic Relations Division (ERD).

Of the total, about $482 million came from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and $12.4 million from the World Bank, while the rest was committed by various bilateral development partners.

The IMF introduced, for the first time, a ceiling on Bangladesh's foreign borrowing during the third and fourth reviews of its $5.5 billion loan package in June this year. The new condition aims to contain risks stemming from the country's rising external debt.

Under the terms, Bangladesh can borrow a maximum of $8.44 billion in fresh external loans during FY2026, with a quarterly cap of $1.91 billion for the first quarter. The IMF said it will closely monitor the government's foreign borrowing on a quarterly basis.

An IMF mission is currently in Dhaka to conduct the fifth review of the programme, which will examine both domestic and external debt levels.

No such limit was in place when the IMF originally approved a $4.7 billion programme in early 2023. The fourth and fifth tranches, approved in June 2025, added about $800 million to the total package and extended the programme by six months. So far, Bangladesh has received $3.6 billion under the loan package.

A senior finance ministry official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the borrowing ceiling is based on the IMF's latest Debt Sustainability Analysis (DSA), which has classified Bangladesh as a moderate-risk country for two consecutive years

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Govt revises policy to ensure accountability of state banks' boards

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The government has revised a policy aimed at enhancing accountability in the appointment and performance of chairmen and directors of state-owned banks and financial institutions.

The move is part of a broader effort to curb corruption and improve profitability across the sector, according to the policy issued by the Financial Institutions Division (FID) yesterday.

This is the first time that performance evaluation criteria have been formally incorporated into board appointments.

"Chairmen and directors will be subject to annual performance reviews to ensure accountability," says the policy.

Reappointments will be contingent on prior results. The policy also mandates capacity-building initiatives through training and workshops.

In a significant shift, the policy explicitly outlines board-level responsibilities, including strategic policy formulation, risk management, internal audit and control, and compliance oversight.

"But the board will not get involved in everyday administrative activities of the entity," says a new clause in the revised policy.

These provisions are designed to ensure that board members play an active role in institutional governance.

The directive follows an earlier circular issued on April 9, 2024, which called for revisions to the existing appointment guidelines for directors of state-owned commercial banks, specialised banks, and financial institutions.

Under the new rules, individuals with loan or tax defaults, or lacking a minimum of 10 years' experience in administration, management, or professional fields, will be disqualified from board membership.

Those with a history of criminal offences, fraud, financial misconduct, or adverse court rulings will also be barred. Directors may not simultaneously serve on the boards of multiple banks or financial institutions.

READ MORE ON B3

Banks' lending to SMEs falls to four-year low

SOHEL PARVEZ

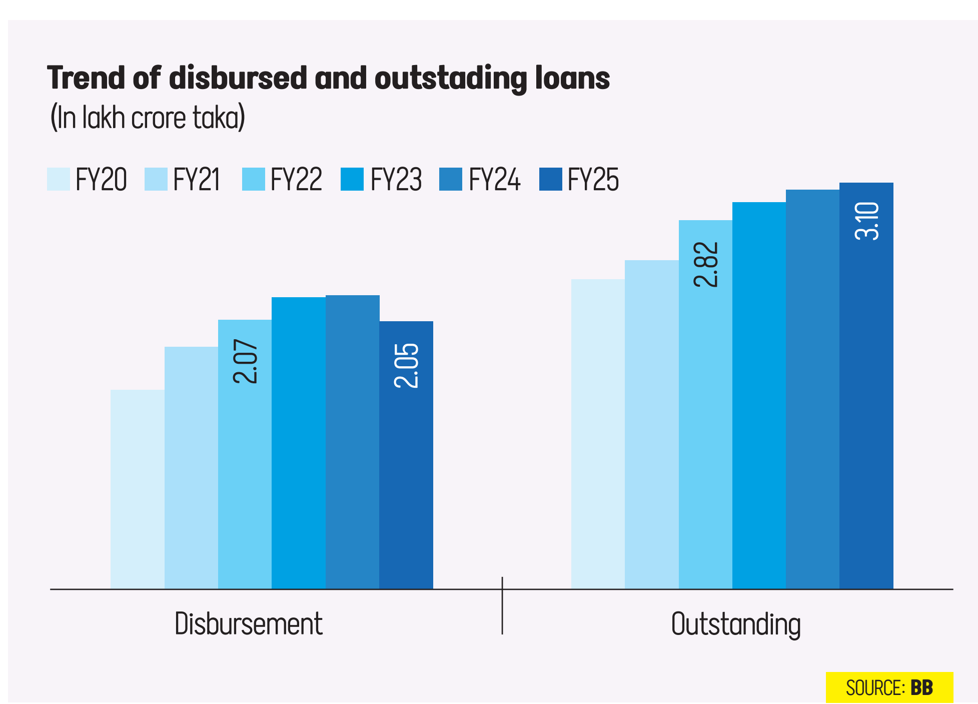
Banks' lending to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) has fallen to a four-year low, putting the brakes on the rising trend in loan disbursements, as political uncertainty and the economic slowdown have dampened borrowing appetite among entrepreneurs.

During fiscal year (FY) 2024-25, banks disbursed Tk 2.05 lakh crore in loans to SMEs — down 9 percent year-on-year — according to data from Bangladesh Bank (BB).

"Businesses do not want to invest in times of uncertainty. Right now, firms are focused on survival, not expansion," said Syed Abdul Momen, additional managing director and head of SME Banking at BRAC Bank PLC, one of the leading financiers of small businesses.

Dubbed the backbone of the industrial sector, Bangladesh has around 78 lakh cottage, micro, small, and medium enterprises, which together contribute about one-fourth of the country's gross domestic product (GDP).

Until FY2023-24, lending to SMEs had been growing steadily since 2021, following a dip in 2020 when small businesses suffered amid Covid-19 restrictions, according to BB data.



SOURCE: BB

"Businesses do not want to invest in times of uncertainty. Right now, firms are focused on survival, not expansion," said Syed Abdul Momen, additional managing director and head of SME Banking at BRAC Bank PLC

"Since Covid, the war in Ukraine, and the political unrest and mass uprising last year, businesses have not had any respite," said Kamrul Mehedi, deputy managing director and head of SME & Agent Banking at City Bank PLC, another major lender to small entrepreneurs.

"Small businesses, in particular, have low resilience and are vulnerable to shocks," he said.

He said these disruptions have taken a toll on small firms, with nearly one-fourth of them shutting down since the pandemic.

"What we're seeing now is that many small businesses we financed earlier are not coming back for new loans," Mehedi added.

Bankers said while political uncertainty, the economic slowdown, and persistently high inflation have weakened loan demand, the fragility of nearly a dozen banks has also constrained credit availability for small and micro businesses.

As of June 2025, outstanding SME loans stood at Tk 3.10 lakh crore, up slightly from a year earlier, according to BB data.

"Some banks have collapsed due to loan irregularities and are doing almost nothing now," said Syed Mahbubur Rahman, managing director and CEO of Mutual Trust Bank PLC.

"Some 10-12 banks, including several shariah-based ones, were once active in SME financing. They are no longer participating in this area," he added.

Salekeen Ibrahim, executive vice president of Eastern Bank PLC, said SME loan disbursement has reached its lowest point in recent years, clearly reflecting the tough economic climate prevailing in Bangladesh.

"Tight liquidity and high non-performing loans (NPLs) are among the major obstacles," he said.

"Many banks are struggling with capital shortages and rising bad loans, making them risk-averse. Private sector confidence has been weak for a long time, and uncertainty continues to delay new business plans and expansions," he said.

Bankers expressed optimism that both loan demand and disbursements will pick up after the national election scheduled for February next year.

"Businesses will regain confidence after the election. The economy usually sees a surge when a political government comes to power following polls," said BRAC Bank's Momen.

MTB to buy Gulshan land for Tk 300cr to build HQ

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Mutual Trust Bank (MTB) PLC has decided to buy one bigha of land in Dhaka's upscale Gulshan area at Tk 300 crore for the construction of its corporate head office.

The plan to buy the land on Gulshan Avenue was approved by the board of the private bank on Wednesday, according to a disclosure by MTB on the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) news board yesterday.

The price of the property excludes value-added tax and registration-related costs, and is subject to the approval of the regulatory authorities, the bank said.

The price of the property excludes value-added tax and registration-related costs

MTB said its board also approved the cancellation of the earlier approval for purchasing 15 floors of a newly constructed 21-storied commercial building.

Earlier in February this year, MTB announced a plan to acquire the floors for the same purpose, which would cost Tk 450 crore for the bank.

MTB's profit remained unchanged at Tk 203 crore in the January-September period of 2025.

Shares of the bank closed at Tk 12.20 yesterday, up 0.83 percent from the previous day.

Bank Asia profit jumps 71% in Jan-Sept

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Bank Asia PLC has posted a 71 percent year-on-year rise in net profit to Tk 351 crore for the first nine months of 2025, up from Tk 205 crore during the same period last year.

To disclose the results to shareholders, the bank held an online-based earnings disclosure for the third quarter (Q3) of 2025 at Bank Asia Tower in Karwan Bazar, Dhaka on Wednesday, according to a press release.

Sohail RK Hussain, managing director of Bank Asia PLC, along with ANM Mahfuz and Nurullah Chaudhury, additional managing directors, as well as deputy managing directors and the chief financial officer, were present at the programme.

The bank reported that investment income nearly doubled to Tk 1,930 crore, boosting its operating profit.

Its earnings per share (EPS) rose to Tk 2.58, compared to Tk 1.44 a year earlier, while net asset value (NAV) per share reached Tk 29.28, marking a 21 percent year-on-year increase.

During the July-September quarter alone, the bank posted a net profit of approximately Tk 39.90 crore.

Bank Asia also reported a significant rise in operating cash flow, supported primarily by strong growth in customer deposits.

Sohail RK Hussain, managing director of Bank Asia PLC, attends the bank's earnings disclosure for the third quarter of 2025 at Bank Asia Tower in Karwan Bazar, Dhaka on Wednesday. PHOTO: BANK ASIA

Concord begins work on 'Villa Bellanova' in Gulshan

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Concord Real Estate Limited has begun construction of Concord Villa Bellanova, a luxury residential project in Gulshan that promises elegant homes combining comfort, privacy, and modern design.

Located on Road 36, just a short walk from the Gulshan Central Mosque, the project aims to set a new benchmark for refined urban living, the company said in a press release.

Villa Bellanova will comprise only 12 apartments, each occupying an entire floor of around 2,920 square feet.

Designed to maximise natural light and ensure privacy, the north-facing building stands on a 55-foot-wide road in one of the city's most peaceful and prestigious neighbourhoods.

The ground floor will feature landscaped surroundings, mood lighting, a welcoming reception area, and interior-designed lobbies.

A rooftop swimming pool surrounded by gardens, a modern gym, a private lounge, and an open BBQ patio will complement the residents' lifestyle.

With 24-hour security, a modern firefighting system, and optional home automation, the project combines safety, comfort and luxury.

In the release, Concord said the new development adds to a remarkable year for the company, which has launched several major projects across prime locations in Dhaka as it celebrates its 50th anniversary.

Pubali Bank signs deal with BMU for online OPD ticketing

Prof Md Shahinul Alam, acting vice-chancellor of Bangladesh Medical University, and Mohammad Ali, managing director and chief executive officer of Pubali Bank PLC, pose for photographs after signing the agreement in Dhaka on Wednesday. PHOTO: PUBALI BANK

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Pubali Bank PLC has signed an agreement with Bangladesh Medical University (BMU) to implement an online ticketing system for the university's outpatient department (OPD).

From now on, patients can purchase OPD tickets online from home without having to stand in long queues.

Md Rabiul Alam, deputy general manager and head of the ADC division at Pubali Bank PLC, and Prof Nahreen Akhtar, treasurer of Bangladesh Medical University, signed the agreement in Dhaka on Wednesday, according to a press release.

Prof Md Shahinul Alam, acting vice-chancellor of BMU, attended the signing ceremony as the chief guest, while Mohammad Ali, managing director and chief executive officer of Pubali Bank PLC, was present as the special guest.

Prof Md Abul Kalam Azad, pro-vice-chancellor (administration) of the university; Prof Md Mujibur Rahman Hawlader, pro-vice-chancellor (research and development); Prof Md Nazrul Islam, registrar; Md Shahnewaz Khan, deputy managing director of the bank; and Abu Laich Md Samsujjaman, general manager and regional manager for the Dhaka Central Zone, were also present.

Endra Mohan Sutradhar, general manager and head of SDD and CTO (TC) of the bank; Masuma Khatun, deputy general manager and head of the Shahbagh Avenue Branch; and Md Shamsul Alam, assistant general manager of the ADC division, attended the event, along with other senior officials from both organisations.

Boeing reports $5.4b loss in Q3

AFP, *New York*

Boeing on Wednesday reported a third-quarter loss of $5.4 billion as massive added costs from the delayed certification of its 777X aircraft weighed down its results.

The aviation giant scored a 30-percent jump in revenues to $23.3 billion following much higher commercial plane deliveries compared with the year-ago level.

But the performance was marred by a one-time charge of $4.9 billion on the repeatedly delayed 777X program, which has faced a prolonged certification process with US authorities.

Boeing had hoped to begin the next phase of certification flights this year. But the company has pushed those back until 2027 to complete needed preparatory analysis, company officials said.

Chief Executive Kelly Ortberg pointed to the October approval by the Federal Aviation Administration of an increased monthly production rate on the 737 MAX as a sign of the company's progress.

He also noted that Boeing generated positive free cash flow during the quarter, a benchmark closely watched by Wall Street.

But Ortberg said more work was still needed to turn Boeing around after a series of safety problems, including two fatal 737 MAX crashes in 2018 and 2019 that have led to more intense FAA scrutiny over new plane certifications.

National Housing Finance signs MoU with JBS Holdings

STAR BUSINESS DESK

National Housing Finance PLC has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with JBS Holdings Limited, a leading real estate developer in Bangladesh.

Mohammad Shamsul Islam, managing director of National Housing Finance PLC, and Abdul Huque, managing director of JBS Holdings Limited, signed the MoU at the developer's office in Bashundhara Residential Area, Dhaka on Wednesday, according to a press release.

Under the agreement, apartment buyers of JBS Holdings will be able to avail home loan facilities from National Housing Finance PLC on easy terms and within a short processing time.

Among others, Shital Chandra Saha, senior executive vice-president and head of operations at JBS Holdings; Mahbubur Rashid Al-Amin, vice-president and head of business; Jahangir Alam Patwary, adviser; and Md Belayet Hossain, general manager and head of sales, were also present.

Abdul Huque, managing director of JBS Holdings Limited, and Mohammad Shamsul Islam, managing director of National Housing Finance PLC, exchange signed documents of the memorandum of understanding at the developer's office in Dhaka on Wednesday. PHOTO: NATIONAL HOUSING FINANCE

GPH Ispat holds seminar in Chattogram

STAR BUSINESS DESK

GPH Ispat Ltd, one of the country's leading steel manufacturers, recently organised a special technical seminar, titled "Design Guidelines and Code Provisions for Using Higher-Grade Rebar (B600D-R) in RCC Structures: Exploring Opportunities for Rebar Savings in the Context of Bangladesh", in Chattogram.

The seminar featured the country's top engineers and architects who discussed advanced design concepts, structural efficiency, and the use of sustainable construction materials, according to a press release.

Renowned educators and structural engineering experts such as Prof M Shamim Z Bosunia, Prof Syed Fakhrul Ameen, and Prof Raquib Ahsan attended the event.

Md Saiful Islam, deputy general manager and head of TMPM, also shared his expert insights on rebar applications and market innovations.

Prof M Shamim Z Bosunia delivers his speech at the seminar organised by GPH Ispat Limited in Chattogram recently. PHOTO: GPH ISPAT

The keynote address was delivered by Abdullah Al Hossain Chowdhury (Rizvi), who presented a paper highlighting the design and economic benefits of using high-quality rebar and discussed in detail the application of this technology in modern reinforced concrete structures.

He said, "By using high-quality rebar (B600D-R), we are not only ensuring greater structural stability and safety but also unlocking new possibilities for cost efficiency and resource optimisation in construction. I believe this technology will pave the way for design innovation and sustainable growth in Bangladesh's construction industry."

By organising this seminar with the country's leading engineers, architects, and senior officials from both the public and private sectors, GPH Ispat once again demonstrated its commitment to advancing the nation's engineering expertise, technological innovation, and knowledge sharing to build a stronger and more sustainable Bangladesh, the release added.

Mohammed Jahangir Alam, managing director of GPH Ispat; Mohammed Almas Shimul, additional managing director; directors Abdul Ahad and Sadman Syka Sefa; and Mohammad Mamun Kabir, senior general manager (sales and marketing), also attended the event, along with other senior officials.

Community Bank unveils 'SME 360°' to boost small businesses

Inspector General of Police Baharul Alam, chairman of Community Bank Bangladesh PLC, inaugurates the platform, titled "Community SME 360°", at InterContinental Dhaka in the capital recently. PHOTO: COMMUNITY BANK

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Community Bank Bangladesh PLC has launched "Community SME 360°", an all-in-one platform designed to accelerate the growth of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) across Bangladesh.

The initiative marks a major step in the country's SME banking sector by integrating access to finance, business opportunities, and professional support under a single platform, the bank said in a press release.

Inspector General of Police Baharul Alam, chairman of Community Bank, inaugurated the platform as the chief guest at InterContinental Dhaka in the capital recently.

The platform combines banking, business, and digital ecosystem solutions to help SMEs overcome common challenges through financial products, strategic guidance, market connectivity, and digital tools.

Entrepreneurs will gain access to dedicated relationship managers, vetted business models, and networking opportunities through branch-based facilities.

"The platform will enable SMEs to access finance, business models, and digital tools that foster growth and competitiveness both locally and globally," said Kimiwa Saddat, managing director of the bank.

"We believe SME 360° will redefine the SME banking experience in Bangladesh."

The platform also offers agent banking and franchise partnerships, export and import linkages, accounting and compliance support, and advanced cash management solutions.

Beyond banking services, Community SME 360° enables entrepreneurs to engage as agent banking franchisees, dealers, distributors, or vendors to large corporates, while also facilitating franchise and export opportunities for Bangladeshi SMEs in international markets.

ONE Bank receives ISO certification

STAR BUSINESS DESK

ONE Bank PLC has received an internationally recognised certification from the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) through the France-based certification authority Bureau Veritas (Bangladesh) Pvt Ltd for meeting the requirements of the ISO standard.

The ISO is a global standard that specifies the requirements for establishing, implementing, and maintaining an Information Security Management System (ISMS).

Bureau Veritas (Bangladesh) conducted an audit of the bank's IT operations, data centre, and disaster recovery site to verify compliance with the ISO/IEC standard.

Sohel Azad, country manager of Bureau Veritas (Bangladesh) Pvt Ltd, handed over the certificate to Shabbir Ahmed, managing director (current charge) of ONE Bank PLC, at the bank's corporate headquarters recently, according to a press release.

In addition, ONE Bank has been ISO certified since 2022.

John Sarkar, adviser of ONE Securities Limited -- a subsidiary of ONE Bank, Md Anwarul Islam, deputy managing director and head of legal affairs and recovery division, along with other senior officials of ONE Bank, iota, and Bureau Veritas, were also present.

Shabbir Ahmed, managing director (current charge) of ONE Bank PLC, receives an ISO certificate from Sohel Azad, country manager of Bureau Veritas (Bangladesh) Pvt Ltd, at the bank's corporate headquarters in Dhaka recently. PHOTO: ONE BANK

Domestic tourist spots draw large crowds as visitors enjoy the cooler weather for sightseeing and outdoor activities.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

Tourism fair kicks off with flurry of offers

Companies offering discounts on travel packages and bookings

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bringing all travel-related services under one roof, the three-day Bangladesh Travel and Tourism Fair began yesterday at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre, offering a range of attractive packages to travellers.

More than 120 local and international agencies are showcasing their products and services across about 220 stalls and 20 pavilions.

Participants include national tourism boards, airlines, tour operators, hotels, resorts, travel agencies, financial institutions, healthcare providers and other tourism-related enterprises.

Tourism boards and associations from Pakistan, Nepal and Bhutan are taking part in the thirteenth edition of the event, alongside representatives from the Maldives, Singapore, Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand, China, Sri Lanka, the Philippines and Turkey.

Throughout the fair, exhibitors are offering discounts and promotional deals on everything from air tickets and hotel bookings to domestic and international tour packages. The Tour Operators Association of Bangladesh (Toab), the apex body representing the country's tourism industry, has organised the event.

It was inaugurated by Lutfe Siddiqi, special envoy to the chief adviser on international affairs, with Toab President Md Rafeuzzaman presiding over the ceremony.

With winter approaching, a season when many plan both local and overseas trips, visitors said the fair marks the start of their long-awaited holiday season.

For example, real estate businessman Abu Saleh Md Musa came to the fair to explore family tour packages.

"Usually, we look up tour operators online," he said. "But this fair gives us the chance to compare so many packages and deals face-to-face; it feels more real."

Otithi, a tourism initiative by BRAC, is offering visitors a Tk 1,000 discount on bookings made at the fair with an initial payment of Tk 1,500.

The platform promotes community-based tourism, encouraging visitors to explore both the cultural heritage and natural beauty of Bangladesh.

"Beyond showcasing historical and cultural treasures, we offer travellers a glimpse of Bangladesh's beautiful landscapes and encourage deeper connections with local communities," said Asaduzzaman Rabbi, an official of Otithi.

He added that the platform arranges trips to community-based destinations such as Sreemangal, Rajshahi, Madhupur, Bogura, Paharpur in Naogaon and Natore's Zamindari estates, with packages ranging from Tk 3,500 to Tk 40,000.

However, several exhibitors and visitors expressed concern over political uncertainty ahead of the national election scheduled for February next year. Besides, restrictions on popular tourist destinations, such as Saint Martin's Island, have also caused fears of a business slowdown.

"We do not know what might happen during the election period. Any instability could create serious obstacles for the tourism industry," said Tahmid Ahmed, senior executive of Trip Silo.

The travel planner, which caters to 350 to 500 visitors during the fair, is offering up to 50 percent discounts on its packages.

At the inauguration, Chief Adviser's Special Envoy Lutfey Siddiqi said, "Tourism is one of the key sectors for employment generation in Bangladesh. Many other sectors are being transformed by technology and artificial intelligence, but tourism remains a people-centred service industry."

"Look at countries like Singapore; even without significant heritage assets, they are attracting a huge number of tourists. We should think along those lines," he added.

In his concluding remarks, Toab President Md Rafeuzzaman said Bangladesh needs to introduce an e-visa system instead of the current on-arrival visa process to attract more foreign tourists.

"In addition, if amusement parks, hotels, resorts, vehicles and other tourism-related equipment could be brought under a low-tax regime, the sector would expand further," he added.

DSE edges up on large-cap momentum

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Dhaka stocks rose for a second consecutive session yesterday, lifted by gains in large-cap shares on the week's final trading day.

The DSEX, the benchmark index of the bourse, advanced 29.82 points, or 0.58 percent, to close at 5,122.22, according to data from the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE).

Other indices also mirrored the positive trend of the main index, as the Shariah-based DSES and the blue-chip DS30 both edged higher.

"The market closed in the black as all large-cap sectors posted positive performance," BRAC EPL Stock Brokerage Ltd said in its daily market update.

However, turnover—a key gauge of investor activity—declined by 5 percent to Tk 476 crore, reflecting subdued investor sentiment despite the positive market movement.

Among the major sectors, non-bank financial institutions posted the day's biggest gain, rising 1.73 percent, followed by telecoms.

Other sectors that advanced included fuel and power, engineering, banking, food and allied, and pharmaceuticals.

Block trades—high-volume transactions involving large numbers of securities—contributed 2.5 percent of the overall market turnover.

Market breadth was positive, with 241 issues advancing, 81 declining, and 72 remaining unchanged.

Orion Infusion was the most traded stock of the day, posting a turnover of Tk 32 crore, according to BRAC EPL.

Tamijuddin Textile Mills surged 13.71 percent to top the gainers' list, while Orion Infusion dropped 4.48 percent, becoming the worst performer of the session.

Microsoft's revenue jumps 18%

AFP, *San Francisco*

Microsoft reported stronger-than-expected quarterly results Wednesday, with revenue jumping 18 percent to $77.7 billion as demand for artificial intelligence services boosted its cloud computing business.

But shares in the Redmond, Washington-based company slid by as much as 3.6 percent in after-hours trading amid concerns about the pace of AI monetization.

Microsoft's cloud revenue climbed 26 percent to $49.1 billion, underscoring robust enterprise demand for AI-powered services.

However, the results landed as its Azure cloud computing service was experiencing a shutdown that was affecting customer companies across the globe as well as Microsoft's own websites.

The company's Azure cloud platform posted particularly strong growth with revenue up 40 percent.

Microsoft has continued investing heavily in artificial intelligence, including big investments in data centers and its partnership with ChatGPT-maker OpenAI.

Global firms slash jobs amid weak sentiment, AI push

REUTERS

Companies around the globe have ramped up job cuts, with blue-chips from Amazon to Nestle and UPS reining in spending while consumer sentiment dims and AI-focused tech companies start to replace jobs with automation.

According to a Reuters tally, American companies have announced more than 25,000 job cuts this month, not including UPS's 48,000 figure, which dates from the beginning of 2025. In Europe, the total tops 20,000, with Nestlé accounting for the bulk after last week's 16,000-role reduction.

With economy-wide numbers on job cuts not available given the US government is in the middle of its second-longest shutdown in history, investors are paying extra attention to these anecdotal stories of layoffs. That's even if year-end layoffs are common and many of the eye-catching cuts will be stretched out over a prolonged period.

"Investors are asking themselves, what does this mean? And specifically, what's the overall picture since we can't see it?" said Adam Sarhan, chief executive of 50 Park Investments in New York. Cuts like those at Amazon "tells me the economy is slowing down, not getting stronger. You don't have mass layoffs when the economy is strong."

Amazon said it would cut up to 14,000 jobs from its corporate workforce, joining Target, Procter & Gamble and others in axing thousands of office roles. Reuters reported on Monday as many as 30,000 Amazon jobs could be eliminated.

The reasons for the cuts vary. Some, like Target and Nestle, have new CEOs eager to restructure their operations. Baby-apparel company Carter's is slashing 15 percent of office jobs as it struggles with hefty import tariffs imposed by US President Donald Trump.

What stands out is the focus by companies like Amazon and Target on white-collar roles seen as vulnerable to AI-driven automation, rather than those on shop or factory floors. Some analysts say Amazon's move could be an early sign of deeper structural shifts as companies push to justify billions spent on AI tools.

Target's cuts affect 8 percent of its corporate staff but Amazon's cuts affect just 14,000 positions within its 1.5 million-strong workforce.

KPMG's latest survey of US-based executives released in September shows projected AI investment has jumped 14 percent since the first quarter to an average of $130 million over the next year. And 78 percent of executives say they are under intense pressure from boards and investors to prove AI is saving money and boosting profits.

The occupations most likely to be affected would be where entry-level work is replaced with automation, Bank of America economists wrote on Oct. 22. So far, however, businesses loaded with white-collar workers such as those in the information, finance, and professional services sector have seen job growth in tandem with increased AI usage, they wrote.

"I'm reticent to say it's AI just yet," said Allison Shrivastava, economist with Indeed Hiring Lab in Saratoga Springs, New York, who said the tech sector has been retrenching since a 2022 peak. "It has the potential to impact the labor market, but I don't think we're seeing that strong an impact right now."

With the US government shut, data is at a premium. Weekly state jobless figures so far do not show a measurable surge in layoffs, but job growth remains subdued. Payroll provider ADP on Tuesday estimated an increase of 14,250 jobs in the four-week period ended Oct. 11.

PHOTO: AFP/FILE

Proteus, an autonomous robot used to carry carts full of packages to the delivery trucks, is seen at MQY1 Amazons warehouse in Mt Juliet, Tennessee. Amazon said it would cut up to 14,000 jobs from its workforce.

Fed lowers rates

REUTERS, *Washington*

A policy divide within the US central bank and a lack of federal government data may put another interest rate cut out of reach this year, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said on Wednesday, as he acknowledged the threats that officials see to the job market but also the risky nature of making further rate moves without a fuller picture of the economy.

The Fed on Wednesday cut interest rates by a quarter of a percentage point, as expected, as a way to temper any further weakening of the job market. But the central bank's new policy statement, opens new tab included several references to the lack of official data during a federal government shutdown, and Powell told reporters later that policymakers are likely to become more cautious if it deprives them of further job and inflation reports.

"We're going to collect every scrap of data we can find, evaluate it and think carefully about it. And that's our job," Powell said in a press conference after a two-day policy meeting, as he ticked off private data the Fed can use, along with its own in-house surveys of business executives and less formal interviews with a range of contacts around the country.

"If you asked me could it affect ... the December meeting, I'm not saying it's going to, but yeah, you could imagine that. You know, what do you do if you're driving in the fog? You slow down."

His comments show the developing dilemma for the Fed as a budget dispute between the Trump administration and Democrats in Congress extends into a second month, with the government unable to carry out surveys and produce reports that are key to central bankers' policy decisions - in this case possibly delaying rate cuts that President Donald Trump himself wants.

Foreign loan pledges jump 33 times

FROM PAGE B1

The downgrade from low risk followed growing repayment pressures amid weaker export earnings and sluggish revenue growth.

According to the DSA, Bangladesh's debt-to-export ratio jumped to 162.7 percent in FY2024, far higher than the IMF's earlier projection of around 116-118 percent. The debt service-to-revenue ratio has also climbed, narrowing fiscal space for new borrowing.

The IMF noted that these ratios exceeded its stress-test thresholds largely due to the downward revision of export figures.

"Although Bangladesh's total external debt remains below all IMF thresholds, the risks have increased in certain areas, prompting this precautionary measure," the finance ministry official said.

Government data show that external debt rose from $20.3 billion in FY2010 to $68.8 billion in FY2024, reaching $80.19 billion by June 2025.

Debt servicing has surged accordingly, from $876 million in FY2010 to about $4 billion in the last fiscal year. In the first quarter of the current FY2026, debt servicing climbed 14 percent year-on-year to $1.28 billion, including $817 million in principal payments and the rest as interest.

Meanwhile, foreign aid disbursements increased 36 percent year-on-year to $1.15 billion in the first quarter, driven largely by a stable political environment.

The World Bank topped the list with $323 million in project disbursements, followed by Russia's $315 million for the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant, ADB's $188 million, India's $63 million, and Japan's $41 million. No Chinese funds were disbursed during the period.

Govt revises policy

FROM PAGE B1

Board appointments will prioritise professionals with expertise in economics, banking, financial markets, monetary policy, financial management, commerce, agriculture, industry, law, or information technology.

The government will retain discretion in selecting candidates with proven track records.

The policy reiterates a previous provision that at least one-third of board members should be women — a requirement that has been largely ignored in past appointments.

Chairmen and directors will serve three-year terms, with a maximum of two consecutive terms permitted. Eligibility for reappointment will resume after a three-year hiatus. Age limits for directors have been set between 45 years and 75 years.

The reforms come amid longstanding criticism of irregularities and political patronage in board appointments.

During the previous Awami League administration, individuals from diverse backgrounds — including academics, cultural figures, former bureaucrats, journalists, and political activists from both ruling and opposition parties — were appointed to bank boards.

Many lacked expertise in banking, monetary policy, or financial management, prompting widespread concern over governance standards.

Despite existing guidelines, past appointments often bypassed formal criteria, contributing to governance lapses and financial underperformance.

The revised policy seeks to restore credibility and discipline to the sector by enforcing stricter eligibility and accountability measures.

Indian state-backed refinery halts Russian oil

AFP, *New Delhi*

Indian state-backed refiner HPCL-Mittal Energy has halted purchases of Russian crude after US President Donald Trump imposed sanctions on Moscow's two largest oil companies, the firm said.

Relations between Washington and New Delhi plummeted in August after Trump raised tariffs to 50 percent, with US officials accusing India of fuelling Russia's war in Ukraine by buying Moscow's discounted oil.

Trump has claimed that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has agreed to cut its Russian oil imports as part of a prospective US trade deal -- something New Delhi has not confirmed.

HPCL-Mittal Energy Limited (HMEL), a joint venture between steel tycoon Lakshmi Niwas Mittal and state-run Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL), said it had "taken the decision to suspend further purchases of Russian crude".

The statement, issued Wednesday, said last week the decision came after "recent announcements of new restrictions on imports of crude oil from Russia" by the United States, European Union and United Kingdom.

"HMEL's business activity is in-line with Indian government and energy security policy", the statement added.

Reliance Industries, the privately-owned main Indian buyer of Russian crude, said last week it was assessing the implications of Washington's restrictions, as well as those imposed this week by the European Union.

Alphabet posts first $100b quarterly revenue

AFP, *San Francisco*

Google parent Alphabet reported its first-ever $100 billion quarterly revenue on Wednesday, powered by strong growth across its core search business and rapidly expanding cloud division that was buoyed by artificial intelligence.

The tech giant's revenues jumped 16 percent year-on-year to $102.3 billion in the third quarter, beating analyst expectations and marking a milestone for the company founded by Larry Page and Sergey Brin in 1998.

"Alphabet had a terrific quarter, with double-digit growth across every major part of our business," said CEO Sundar Pichai in a statement.

Net income surged 33 percent to $35 billion, with the company pointing to its ability to capitalize on the artificial intelligence boom that is reshaping the tech landscape.

Google's core search and advertising business remained the primary revenue driver, generating $56.6 billion, up from $49.4 billion a year earlier. YouTube advertising revenues also grew strongly to $10.3 billion from $8.9 billion.

But it was Google Cloud that stole the spotlight, with revenues soaring 34 percent to $15.2 billion. The cloud division, which competes with Amazon Web Services and Microsoft Azure, has become a key growth engine for Alphabet.

The company's ambitious approach to offering AI "is delivering strong momentum and we're shipping at speed," Pichai said, highlighting the global rollout of AI features in Google Search and the company's Gemini AI models.

PHOTO: AFP/FILE

In this photograph taken on September 23, employees work at a garment factory in Tiruppur, in India's southern state of Tamil Nadu. Ranked as the world's sixth-largest textile exporter, India has long trailed its regional rivals in export growth.

India moves to boost textile competitiveness against Bangladesh, Vietnam and China

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, *New Delhi*

Faced with a 50 percent tariff imposed by the United States, the Indian government has drawn up a four-point action plan with three separate timeframes to regain cost competitiveness in the global textile market, with a particular focus on competing with Bangladesh, Vietnam, and China.

Ranked as the world's sixth-largest textile exporter, India has long trailed its regional rivals in export growth. The new roadmap, drafted by the Indian Ministry of Textiles, seeks to reverse that trend through structural reforms designed to strengthen competitiveness and expand exports to $100 billion by 2030.

According to a ministry note shared with industry stakeholders, the plan outlines three phases: short-term (two years), medium-term (five years), and long-term (open-ended). It aims to scrutinise the overall cost structure of the sector, including raw material prices, taxation, production costs, labour regulations, and environmental standards.

Four committees comprising textile sector representatives have been formed to deliver time-bound recommendations in four key areas: strategies for new markets; fiscal and ease-of-doing-business measures; structural reforms in the textile value chain; and enhancing cost competitiveness in selected products.

The ministry acknowledges that India's textile competitiveness has eroded in recent years as Bangladesh and Vietnam have gained ground through lower production costs, skilled labour, and modern manufacturing technologies. These advantages have made them formidable competitors for India, particularly in ready-made garments (RMG).

"Labour productivity in India's textile industry remains 20 to 40 percent lower than in its closest competitors, underscoring the urgency for reform," said Shiraz Askari, president of Apollo Fashion International.

India's share in the global textiles and apparel market stood at 4.1 percent in 2024. The sector, including handicrafts, contributed 8.63 percent to the country's total merchandise exports in fiscal year (FY) 2024-25, valued at $37.7 billion.

While the United States remains India's largest export destination, accounting for 28.97 percent of textile and apparel exports, it represents only about 6 percent of the overall Indian textile industry, which is valued at $179 billion -- $142 billion domestic market and $37 billion exports.

The roadmap also places emphasis on India's 15 existing Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with countries that collectively import $198.9 billion worth of textiles annually. The South Asian country is currently in advanced talks to sign an FTA with the European Union, whose combined textile import market is estimated at $268.8 billion -- more than twice the size of the US market.

Provisional data from the Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics (DGCIS) show India's textile exports reached $3.10 billion in July 2025, marking a 5.37 percent year-on-year rise from $2.94 billion a year earlier. For April-July 2025, cumulative exports stood at $12.18 billion, up 3.87 percent year-on-year.

RMG exports rose to $1.34 billion in July 2025, up 4.75 percent, while cotton textiles -- including yarn, fabrics, made-ups, and handlooms -- reached $1.02 billion, up 5.17 percent year-on-year.

In contrast, the US imported $107.7 billion worth of textiles in 2024, up 3 percent from the previous year. China accounted for 21 percent of those imports, followed by Vietnam at 19 percent, Bangladesh at 9 percent, India at 6 percent, and Sri Lanka at 3 percent.

Askari said India's textile industry must focus on improving efficiency, strengthening compliance, and diversifying export destinations to reduce overdependence on any single market.

The textile ministry's note highlights that Bangladesh and Vietnam enjoy higher labour productivity, more flexible labour laws, and duty-free access to raw materials and key export markets, including Europe. Vietnam also benefits from duty-free access to the Chinese market, further boosting its competitiveness.

The art of letting go

MAHTAB UDDIN AHMED

Last Eid-ul-Azha, I watched my mama in Banani decide he would handle the entire qurbani himself: choosing the cow, doing the paperwork, collecting the cash, sending out the cuts, even cooking the curry while wearing a whistle for some reason. He called his AI-generated spreadsheet "Operation Big Beef" and claimed it would solve world peace. Two hours later, the butcher walked out, the kidneys were missing, and a six-year-old was named "Head of Distribution" simply because he held the only clean bowl. When I elbowed him to delegate, he nodded, gave me the whistle to keep, and said, "I'll delegate watching the work."

In her recent HBR article "Why Aren't I Better at Delegating?" Elsbeth Johnson outlines four common traps leaders fall into: holding on to work because it feels part of their identity, fearing others won't deliver the same quality, giving unclear briefs that cause rework, and believing "it's faster if I do it myself." These habits make leaders busy but not effective. Her core message: real leadership means setting clear outcomes, giving people what they need, trusting them to deliver, and resisting the urge to hover.

Many of us confuse "poster work" with leadership. We still worship the boss who approves every Facebook post, the founder who personally signs every tea bill, and the director who writes every MoU and then proudly walks it to the printer. It's like watching a one-man drama where everyone else is just there to clap.

This disease runs even deeper in family businesses. The first-generation hands over the baton but keeps the stopwatch. They can't accept that the next generation might not be a carbon copy of their own genius. The son or daughter may not bargain like Abba or shout like Chacha, but they might bring something else, like data, design, or diplomacy. The very skills that could take the business further if only the elders loosened their grip.

When I was CEO, I never had to sign PR, PO, or cheques. Not because I was lazy, but because I believed my job was to build a system that worked even when I wasn't in the room. Many leaders here, however, still think signing everything themselves makes them indispensable. In truth, it only makes them the bottleneck in their own legacy, the human version of Dhaka traffic during rush hour.

Gallup studies show that a big part of how happy and engaged a team feels depends on its manager. When managers hold every decision, engagement drops, and that costs real money. HBR adds that leaders already drowning in meetings lose time for real strategy when they do others' work. The result is frustration, burnout, and missed opportunities. Yet there's one exception: during a crisis, people don't want empowerment; they want direction. When the ship shakes, everyone looks for a captain, not a committee.

"But my team isn't ready," you may say. Of course, they aren't because you have never given them the chance. Delegating doesn't mean dumping tasks like jhalmuri onto them and walking away. It means handing over the result, not the steps: set the goal (the "what"), give them tools and access (the "how"), set checkpoints (the "when"), and explain why it matters (the "why"). Then here's the hardest bit: let them do it without you breathing down their neck. A few essential mistakes will be the cost of learning!

Pick one area, such as customer follow-up, vendor onboarding, or monthly review, and assign someone capable as a "shadow lead." Run through three steps: you lead, you co-lead, they lead. In meetings, hang back. Speak last. Reward those who make decisions without you, even when it's a little messy. Write down the process as a simple doc, not a dusty artefact that lives in SharePoint.

True leadership isn't holding the whistle; it's knowing when to pass it. Bangladesh doesn't need more superheroes at work; it requires systems that work even when the hero takes a nap.

The writer is the president of the Institute of Cost and Management Accountants of Bangladesh and founder of BuildCon Consultancies Ltd

Gold demand hits record high

AFP, *London*

Demand for gold hit a record high in the third quarter as the precious metal's price hit all-time highs on geopolitical unrest, industry data showed Thursday.

Total demand grew three percent year-on-year in the July-September period to 1,313 tonnes, the World Gold Council said, as the metal perceived as a safe haven investment benefitted from the Russia-Ukraine war and the Israel-Gaza conflict.

That was the highest level of demand by volume since the WGC began compiling such records around 25 years ago.

"Various regional conflicts, the increasing rhetoric around trade conflicts, all of that combines really to just create this atmosphere of heightened uncertainty" and boost demand for gold, WGC analyst Louise Street told AFP.

A surge in buying, driven by central banks, coincided with gold's price striking record after record this year.

However since the metal struck an all-time peak in October of $4,381.52 an ounce, it has fallen heavily on profit taking.

Gold demand by value surged 44 percent year-on-year to a record $146 billion in the third quarter, the WGC added in its report.

The US government shutdown and expectations of more cuts to Federal Reserve interest rates, which is weighing on the dollar, have lent additional support to gold's price in recent months according to analysts.

There has been strong demand for gold via Exchange-Traded Funds on stock markets. ETFs allow investment without trading on the gold futures market.

The high-price environment has, however, dampened jewellery demand, according to the WGC.

US economy in the dark as govt shutdown cuts off crucial data

AFP, *Washington*

US policymakers, financial institutions and business owners have been flying blind for almost a month as a government shutdown has stopped the release of crucial federal economic data ranging from the size of the labor force to the country's GDP.

The void is set to deepen by Thursday as Washington holds off publishing gross domestic product (GDP) numbers measuring the growth of the world's biggest economy in the July to September period.

The United States has already delayed reports on employment, trade, retail sales and others, only recalling some furloughed staff to produce key inflation figures needed for the government to calculate Social Security payments.

Congressional Republicans and Democrats remain at an impasse, each assigning blame to the other side over the shutdown with no quick end in sight and food aid for millions now at stake.

Analysts warn the growing information blackout could, in turn, cause businesses to lower hiring and investment.

"There's a huge demand right now for government data," said Heather Long, chief economist at Navy Federal Credit Union. "Every industry is trying to figure out if the Federal Reserve is going to keep cutting interest rates."

The central bank's decisions hinge upon the economy's health, particularly inflation and the weakening jobs market.

"This is the time of year where most organizations are finalizing their budgets for 2026," Long told AFP.

"So, almost any company is sitting there thinking: Do we think 2026 is going to be an uptick? Or a slowdown, or a recession?"

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimates the shutdown could cost the economy up to $14 billion.

PHOTO: AFP/FILE

People walk along a street in Manhattan. The United States has delayed reports on employment, trade, retail sales and others as the government shutdown continues.

Economist Matthew Martin of Oxford Economics expects firms to proceed cautiously, with President Donald Trump's tariffs already sending uncertainty surging this year.

"Businesses would therefore reduce their overall hiring to be on the safe side of things, until they see data that really points towards increased demand, or at least stabilization in the economy," he told AFP. Similarly, those in the financial markets need data to make investments and decide their moves in equities, he said.

Should the shutdown last through mid-November, as prediction markets expect, most delayed data releases will likely not come out until December, Goldman Sachs said in a note this week.

"The risk would grow that delays could distort not just the October but the November data too," the report added.

Long said that October's data could even be lost if the shutdown drags on for too long, "because the data was not collected."

Government workers could ask people to recount economic conditions once the shutdown ends, but this proves tricky if the delay is too long, she said.