



Private sector credit appetite wanes further

Credit growth drops to its lowest in at least four years, even as exports, remittances and forex reserves improve

JAGARAN CHAKMA

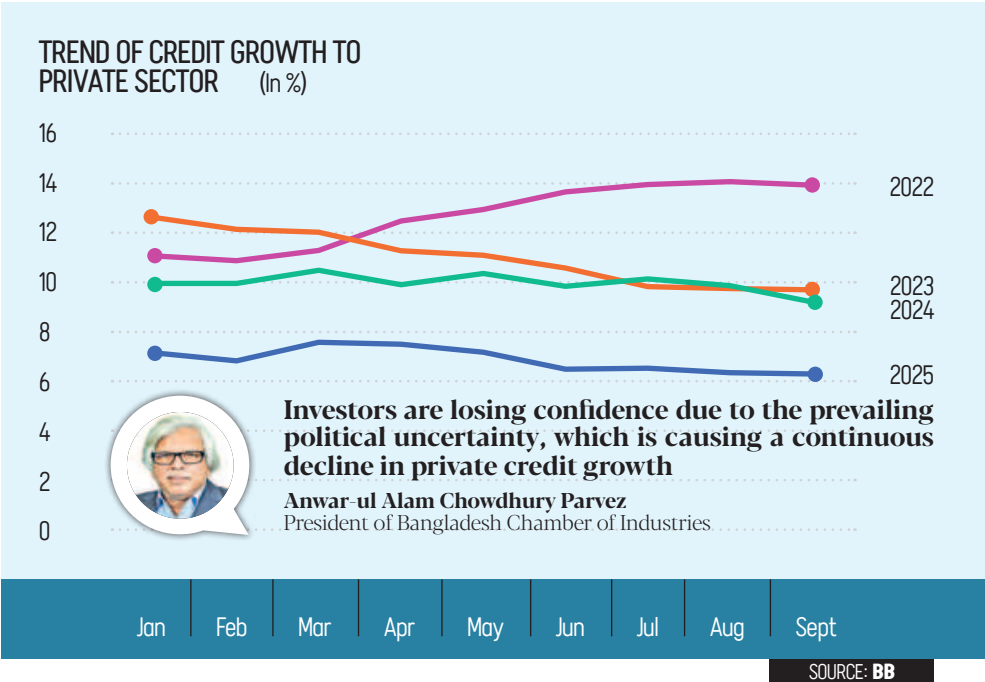
Private sector credit growth declined further in September, hitting its lowest in at least four years, according to the central bank, indicating a stagnation in new investments and job creation even as major economic indicators show improvement.

Business leaders and economists blame a combination of factors, such as high interest rates on bank loans, cautious lending by banks and uncertainty over the political situation, for the slump.

Bankers say many of their corporate clients are now taking a wait-and-see approach. They believe demand for loans may recover after the national election scheduled for February next year.

Private sector credit growth fell to 6.29 percent in September, down from 6.35 percent in August, according to the latest data by the Bangladesh Bank (BB).

In its monthly update, the General Economics Division (GED) of the Planning Commission described August's growth as



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“a historic low”, well below the central bank’s target of 7.2 percent for the current fiscal year.

GED says high interest rates, cautious lending and both political and economic uncertainty are the main reasons for the prolonged weakness.

This comes at a time when other economic indicators are showing positive trends. Exports and remittances are increasing, foreign currency reserves have improved, and inflation is easing too.

Anwar-ul Alam Chowdhury Parvez, president of the Bangladesh Chamber of Industries (BCI), said investors are losing confidence due to the prevailing political uncertainty, which is causing a continuous decline in private credit growth.

He expressed concern about the political climate and its impact on businesses.

Parvez criticised the interim government, saying its actions lack predictability and are further denting investor confidence.

are simply trying to survive as the situation is worsening.

He said a credible election is the only way forward, adding that without a democratic process, restoring economic confidence will be difficult.

Meanwhile, Monzur Hossain, a member of the GED, said the persistent fall in credit growth is alarming, as it remains well below the target.

“It indicates that investment activity is weakening,” he said.

Economists point to several causes, including rising interest rates, a subdued business environment and structural weaknesses in the banking sector.

They say liquidity constraints are preventing many banks from extending loans, especially to small and medium enterprises.

M Masrur Reaz, chairman and CEO of Policy Exchange of Bangladesh, said the fall in private sector credit growth is no surprise

in the current climate.

The economist said three main factors are driving the trend.

“First, overall investment is sluggish. Naturally, when investment slows, the demand for credit also falls. Second, domestic consumption has weakened due to high inflation and declining employment, which is also weighing on credit demand.”

“Although imports have picked up slightly compared to the previous year, they have not fully normalised yet,” Reaz said. “As a result, demand for trade credit and trade finance is low.”

He said the consistent drop in credit demand suggests a wider economic slowdown. It signals a lack of new investment and stagnation in existing ventures, especially in manufacturing and services.

He said employment could take a hit, especially among small businesses that are less able to withstand economic shocks. This will eventually slow enterprise growth.

Mati ul Hasan, managing director of Mercantile Bank PLC, said major economic indicators look good. “We have exports and remittances growing.

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Most operators yet to join unified payment system

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Only a handful of institutions have fully joined Bangladesh Bank’s newly launched interoperable digital payment system, while most participants remain either partially active or still undergoing testing, according to the central bank’s latest MFS Interoperability Live Transaction and Testing Status Report.

Islami Bank Bangladesh, Mutual Trust Bank, and Premier Bank PLC have activated both incoming and outgoing transactions under the system. Islami Bank’s interoperability is currently functional through its internet banking platform.

Among mobile financial services, only mCash is fully operational, while Rocket and bKash have partial integration.

Nagad, meanwhile, has been excluded from the platform due to licensing issues. Payment service provider TallyKhata is also handling both incoming and outgoing transactions.

Some institutions have enabled limited connectivity. Pubali Bank PLC has activated only outgoing transactions, while Islamic Wallet and Dutch-Bangla Bank’s Rocket can process only incoming transfers.

Despite being the country’s largest MFS provider, bKash is operating partially, with only incoming transactions active.

Several others remain in the testing or deployment phase. Eastern Bank PLC and Al-Arafah Islami Bank

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Remittance rises 7% in October, but growth slows

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Remittance inflows to Bangladesh grew by 7 percent year-on-year in October, but the growth slowed compared to previous months.

Expatriates sent home \$2.56 billion in the month, up from \$2.39 billion in the same period a year earlier, according to the latest data from Bangladesh Bank.

Bangladesh has been witnessing a growing trend in remittance inflows since December last year due to multiple reasons.

These include a narrowing gap between official and informal exchange rates, and a crackdown on money laundering, industry insiders said.

However, October’s inflow was 4.54 percent lower than the previous month. In September, the remittance inflow stood at \$2.68 billion.

Growth in October was also weaker compared to recent months: 12 percent in September, 9 percent in August, 30 percent in July, and 11 percent in June, data showed.

Expatriates sent home \$2.56 billion in October, up from \$2.39 billion in the same period a year earlier

Officials of the central bank said the figure reflects sustainable growth, but if the country wants higher growth in remittance earnings, it will have to increase manpower exports.

Between July and October of this fiscal year, Bangladesh received \$10.14 billion in remittance, up by 13.54 percent from the same period of the previous fiscal year, data showed.

During the July-October period of fiscal year 2024-25, the remittance inflow was \$8.93 billion.

Over 40 lakh people left the country for jobs abroad in the four years to the end of fiscal year 2024-25, according to the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET).

This migration will push up remittance earnings in the coming days, according to industry insiders.

They also said that since irregular or alternative payment methods are now being controlled, the demand for US dollars has declined, which has caused a drop in foreign currency inflows through hundi or informal channels.

That is why remittance inflows through banking channels are growing, they added.

In fiscal year 2024-25, remittance inflows crossed \$30 billion for the first time and rose by a record \$6.4 billion.

Prior to this, the highest volume of remittance received by Bangladesh was \$24.8 billion in fiscal year 2020-21.

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National Bank reduces quarterly losses

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

National Bank PLC reduced its losses by nearly 34 percent in the July-September quarter of this year, after reporting heavy losses over the past few years due to a large volume of non-performing loans.

In the third quarter of the current calendar year, the bank posted a loss of Tk 463 crore, down from Tk 699 crore in the same period a year earlier.

However, the commercial lender’s total losses in the first nine months of the year rose to Tk 1,448 crore, an 8.4 percent increase compared with the same period in 2024.

In a stock exchange filing, the bank said it was unable to record interest income on certain loans and advances because they were classified and had not been recovered.

It also reported higher interest costs on deposits and borrowings, which resulted in an operating loss.

The bank added that “negative media coverage” led to withdrawals of deposits, putting further pressure on operating cash flow.

Net operating cash flow per share stood at negative Tk 10.54 at the end of the third quarter, compared with negative Tk 11.15 a year earlier.

National Bank has not issued any dividend to shareholders since 2021 and remains in the Z or junk category.

Its share price closed unchanged at Tk 2.90 on the Dhaka Stock Exchange yesterday.

BTRC to seek clarification on Starlink’s bandwidth export bid

MAHMUDUL HASAN

The internet regulator has decided to seek further clarification on Starlink Services Bangladesh Ltd’s bid to export unfiltered bandwidth from Bangladesh through local internet service providers before taking a decision on granting permission to the company.

When bandwidth is filtered, it means network devices such as routers, firewalls, or deep packet inspection (DPI) systems control what kind of data can pass through a connection.

Such filtering can block websites, restrict applications, or slow specific traffic, allowing governments or operators to monitor, prioritise, or censor online content.

In contrast, unfiltered bandwidth means unrestricted data transmission that is not subject to such controls.

The proposed export must be strictly limited to serving Starlink’s foreign customers in neighbouring countries

According to official documents of the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), it must be ensured that the exported data will not serve Bangladeshi customers or foreigners residing in Bangladesh.

The proposed export must be strictly limited to serving Starlink’s foreign customers in neighbouring countries.

Starlink has applied to use international private leased circuit (IPLC) connections, which are dedicated international data links that allow direct transmissions between Bangladesh and other countries.

Alongside that, Starlink requested access to unfiltered IP transit from local operators, enabling it to deliver unrestricted internet services to its customers abroad.

As per the BTRC documents, Starlink must also demonstrate a clear technical mechanism that separates domestic and foreign data traffic.

The regulator requires that a monitoring tool be in place, allowing the BTRC to independently verify such data segregation in real time.

The commission also instructed its relevant departments to carefully review Starlink’s request for IPLC use, taking into account the technical, legal, and regulatory implications before any final approval is granted.

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Telcos can sell phones on instalments by locking all SIMs

The initiative is set to be effective from January 1

MAHMUDUL HASAN

In a bid to make smartphones affordable to all, the authorities have approved a major policy shift allowing mobile operators such as Grameenphone, Robi, and Banglalink to sell regulator-approved smartphones on instalments with the option to keep all SIM/network slots locked until payments are completed.

The decision, taken at the latest commission meeting last week, is set to come into effect on January 1, 2026, and is expected to reshape how low- and middle-income users acquire smartphones. It replaces the BTRC directive issued on June 4 this year, which permitted only partial SIM slot locking.

“This initiative is part of our efforts to boost smartphone penetration,” said Major General (ret’d) Md Emdad ul Bari, chairman of the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC).

“If smartphones can be offered on instalments, the collateral mechanism (SIM locking) will serve as assurance for financing. Earlier, we allowed one SIM-locked handset, but it did not gain proper traction as users could still insert another SIM of a different operator,” he added.

WHAT IT MEANS

Previously, a customer

POLICY

BTRC allows operators to sell smartphones on instalments

Initiative effective from January 1, 2026, ensuring repayment compliance

Operators must partner with BTRC-approved handset importers or manufacturers

OBJECTIVE

Full SIM-slot locking approved until all payments are cleared

Telcos must unlock phones after final instalment is completed

All instalment plans must follow national financial and consumer laws

MONITORING

Policy aims to boost smartphone access among low-income users

BTRC will monitor sales and payment data to prevent misuse

buying a dual-SIM phone from an operator such as Grameenphone could still use

the second slot with a SIM from Robi, Banglalink, Teletalk, or any other provider.

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