Star BUSINESS


# Traders decry police silence on extortion

Labourers load a truck at Khatunganj wholesale market in Chattogram, from where imported essentials are distributed across the country. Traders say extortion has increased around the food supply ahead of Ramadan next year. PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Claiming that extortion has become rampant, large traders have blamed the authorities for failing to ensure a smooth supply of essential commodities.

At a meeting yesterday on commodity supply in the upcoming Ramadan, they said they are forced to pay middlemen as police inaction has allowed such practices to continue unchecked.

The Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) organised the view exchange meeting, where traders from Shyambazar, Moulvibazar and Karwan Bazar also called for steps to stop harassment by public officials and to curb market manipulation by large companies.

Mohammad Farid Uddin, president of the Shyambazar Agricultural Products Traders' Association, alleged that extortion has become widespread. "We pay extortions twice, once while loading and again while unloading goods," he said.

He added that police remain silent despite being aware of the situation.

"There is another problem, the middlemen," he said. "Between the traders and the sellers, there are farias [touts] in Dhaka. They must be eliminated. Because of them, prices rise by 10 to 20 percent."

Omar Faruk, president of the Karwan Bazar Wholesale Traders' Association, said market stability depends entirely on an uninterrupted supply chain.

"If goods flow properly, prices will remain stable," he said, urging that traders be allowed to conduct business "without fear."

He also demanded uniform pricing for soybean oil. "Different companies are selling at different rates. Price discipline must be ensured," he said.

At the programme, former FBCCI director Md Gias Uddin Chowdhury urged the authorities to take stringent action against extortion. "I am not just talking about controlling extortion. I am talking about concrete steps to stop it," he said.

**TRADERS ACCUSE CORPORATES, GOVT OFFICIALS**

Shyambazar Traders' Association President Farid Uddin said corporate businesses are deceiving consumers.

"The word 'corporate' sounds beautiful, but inside it hides something rotten. They buy something for Tk 3, put it in a new packet, and sell it for Tk 40," he commented.

"If you go to the market, and buy rice, lentils, sugar or oil; you will see the reality yourself," he added.

Moulvibazar Traders' Association President Bashir Uddin alleged that during crises, refiners supply edible oil only to selected dealers, creating artificial shortages.

He, too, demanded an end to extortion.

Meanwhile, Zakir Hossain, president of the Super Market Owners' Association, said harassment by public officials has become a regular obstacle.

"Every Ramadan, prices go up, and due to weak monitoring, a few traders take advantage of the situation," he said, criticising large corporate firms for "unjust business practices".

**COMPLAINTS OVER HIGH DUTIES, INTEREST RATES**

At the programme, fruit importers complained about high import duties.

"If the import price of dates is Tk 100, we pay Tk 200 in duties," said Sirajul Islam, president of the Fruit Importers' Association. "High customs valuations not only raise import costs but also create scope for money laundering."

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# Justification, plan needed to defer LDC graduation

## UN team tells govt

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

If Bangladesh wishes to defer its graduation from Least Developed Country (LDC) status, it must submit a formal application with a clear justification and a detailed action plan, a visiting United Nations team told the government yesterday.

The UN team outlined the possible process for such an application at a meeting chaired by Economic Relations Division (ERD) Secretary Shahriar Kader Siddiky, which included representatives from various ministries.

The government has not submitted any proposal for the deferral as of now, a finance ministry official told The Daily Star on condition of anonymity.

The team noted that the country's graduation was previously postponed by two years due to the Covid-19 pandemic. If Bangladesh now seeks a further delay of up to three years, the reasons must be clearly specified, and a comprehensive action plan provided to address existing challenges.

Bangladesh is currently scheduled to graduate from an LDC to a developing country in November next year. The UN visit comes amid calls from local businesses to seek an extension, even though the interim government has repeatedly said it intends to adhere to the original timeline.

The high-level team is led by Roland Mollerus, acting director of UN-OHRLLS – the UN office that supports least developed, landlocked

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# Govt urges patience over pay scale

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Finance Adviser Salehuddin Ahmed has advised government employees to exercise patience regarding the implementation of the new pay structure.

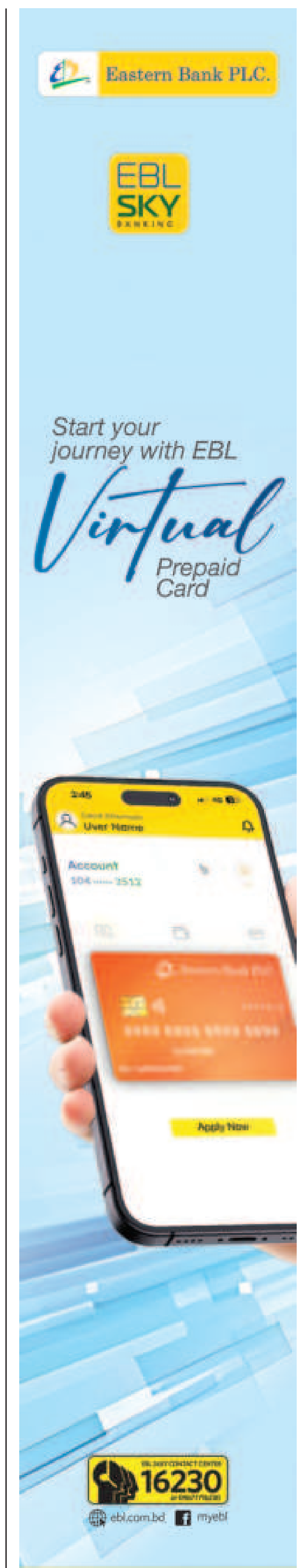
Responding to a journalist's question after a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Government Procurement yesterday, he said, "Nothing has happened in the past seven to eight years. At least we've taken an initiative. Instead of expressing frustration, we should be thanked."

Frustration has grown among government employees as they believe the matter may be delayed until a political government takes office.

A question was raised to the finance adviser about whether the interim government would be able to implement the new pay structure.

Ahmed said the task of finalising the new pay structure is being carried out independently by the National Pay Commission.

"It's a complex process, but the interim government will finalise the pay commission's report (salary structure) for government officials and employees. Hopefully, the next government will treat the matter with importance."




# Govt approves $57m project for e-waste management

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The government has approved a project worth $57 million to establish a modern e-waste management plant amid growing concerns over rising levels of contamination in the country.

The Advisory Committee on Government Purchases on Tuesday approved, in principle, the project for the establishment of the state-of-the-art facility at Kaliakoir Hi-Tech Park in Gazipur.

The project will be implemented by the Bangladesh Hi-Tech Park Authority under the ICT Division through a public-private partnership (PPP) model.

The PPP approach aims to enhance national capacity for e-waste processing while reducing pressure on the government's revenue budget for the high-cost infrastructure.

According to official documents, the project involves the design, installation, and operation of high-technology e-waste processing facilities with an annual processing capacity of 200,000 to 300,000 tonnes.

The proposal sets a target of commissioning the plant by 2028 and anticipates significant employment generation as well as foreign investment opportunities.

Currently, Bangladesh lacks a formal system for managing e-waste.

As a result, the vast majority of electronic waste – often containing hazardous substances such as lead, mercury, and cadmium – is handled by the informal sector.

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# Bangladesh to be 2nd largest LNG importer in S Asia by 2035: IEA

ASIFUR RAHMAN

Bangladesh's liquefied natural gas (LNG) imports are likely to outpace Pakistan's by 2035, making it the second-largest importer in South Asia after India, according to a projection by the International Energy Agency (IEA).

Pakistan and Bangladesh together would import around 75 billion cubic metres (bcm) of LNG in 2035, up roughly 60 percent from 2024 levels, projected the intergovernmental organisation, which provides policy recommendations, analysis, and data.

"In the Stated Policies Scenario, LNG imports in other developing Asia—primarily Pakistan and Bangladesh—increase from 45 bcm in 2024 to 80 bcm in 2035," the IEA said in its latest World Energy Outlook 2025, published yesterday.

The Stated Policies Scenario reflects reading of country-specific energy, climate and related industrial policies that have been adopted or put forward, even if not yet codified in law.

**Bangladesh's expansion of regasification capacity and faster gas-field depletion are expected to lift its import needs**

Though the report did not specifically state the share of each country, the outlook data and infrastructural trends showed that Bangladesh would import around 42-44 bcm of LNG in 2035, while Pakistan would import around 33-36 bcm.

In 2024, Pakistan still imported slightly more LNG than Bangladesh. But by the early 2030s, the IEA projections suggest Bangladesh will pull ahead, driven by faster depletion of local gas and larger regasification capacity.

In India, LNG imports have been growing in recent years, driven by opportunistic buyers and strong potential growth in demand, especially in industry, as per the report.

In 2035, India would import 50 bcm of LNG, up from 35 bcm at present, it added. Both Bangladesh and Pakistan are already dependent on LNG for power generation and industrial feedstock.

However, Bangladesh's expansion of regasification capacity and faster gas-field depletion are expected to lift its import needs beyond Pakistan's over the next decade, the projection suggested.

In Bangladesh, most onshore gas fields are in decline, while new exploration has lagged, driving a steady rise in LNG dependence for electricity generation, fertiliser production, and industries.

The country operates two floating storage and regasification units (FSRUs) and is expected to expand by two more floating and one land-based terminal.

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# Policy support vital for API industry growth: experts

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Health experts and pharmaceutical industry leaders yesterday called for policy support and the removal of tariff and non-tariff barriers to boost local production of raw materials for drugs, aiming to reduce import dependency and keep medicine prices stable.

They also proposed forming a permanent taskforce involving all stakeholders to advance the active pharmaceutical ingredient (API) industry.

Experts said competition in the pharmaceutical sector would intensify once Bangladesh graduates from the least developed country (LDC) category and loses exemptions under the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS).

In such a scenario, increasing local API production will be crucial for sustaining growth.

They noted that with long-term planning and effective public-private partnerships, Bangladesh could become self-reliant in API production within a short time.

The views were shared at a discussion titled "Policies and Implementation Strategies for the Development of the API Industry" at the Super Specialised Hospital of Bangladesh Medical University (BMU) yesterday.

The Alliance for Health Reforms, Bangladesh (AHRB), a platform for healthcare reforms and the event's organiser, offered three proposals – giving production linkage incentives, forming a permanent taskforce, and ensuring an uninterrupted gas supply at the API Industry Park in Munshiganj.

Bangladesh's pharmaceutical sector now meets almost the entire domestic demand for medicines and exports to over 150 countries.

However, most of the raw materials, or APIs, still have to be imported, which increases pressure on foreign currency reserves and makes local production vulnerable to international market volatility.

In a keynote presentation, Prof Syed Abdul Hamid, convenor of the AHRB, said Bangladesh spends $1.3 billion annually to import APIs, so the industry must be developed to save hard-earned foreign currency.

The industry needs to flourish to address the post-LDC graduation challenges of the pharma sector and generate thousands of jobs, he said.

He recommended providing both financial support, including a 20 percent incentive following in the footsteps of India, and policy support, including streamlining regulatory requirements, to develop the sector.

Zakir Hossain, secretary general of the Bangladesh Association of Pharmaceutical Industries (BAPI), said practical policy support was needed to advance the API industry, as merely forming committees would not be enough.

He said that despite several committees being formed by the government over the past 15 months, none included any representatives from BAPI.

Yet, he added, the opinions of relevant stakeholders are essential for the development of this sector.

SM Saifur Rahman, president of the Bangladesh API and Intermediaries Manufacturers Association (BAIMA), said that to compete with India and China, Bangladesh needs to properly understand their strategies for expanding the API industry.

He said India has formed a permanent taskforce to support the growth of its API sector, and Bangladesh should also establish a similar body involving all relevant stakeholders.

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