DHAKA WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 26, 2025, AGRAHAYAN 11, 1432 BS • starbusiness@thedailystar.net

Star BUSINESS

BTRC HEARING

Mobile users decry high costs, poor service

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Mobile phone users from across the country said they continue to suffer from poor service quality, high pricing, unstable network coverage and persistent violations of consumer rights.

Speaking at a public hearing organised by the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) yesterday, participants said mobile services continue to suffer from structural problems, including high costs, weak competition and limited transparency.

They urged the regulator to strengthen enforcement and improve communication with subscribers. The complaints covered a broad spectrum, including mobile number portability (MNP), international roaming charges, unfair balance deductions, high call and internet rates, and limited options for switching networks.

BTRC officials listened to complaints, offered clarifications and said all issues would be recorded for review and resolution.

PRICING, ROAMING RULES

Ashiq Ahmed, a user, said the MNP service introduced in 2018 has failed to boost competition or improve service quality. He asked what steps the BTRC has taken to promote the service.

Sheikh Shajib Alam, who lived in India for four years for studies and kept his Bangladeshi SIM active only for OTPs, said both his international roaming and main balance were erased because he had not recharged within a certain time.

When he contacted, telecom operator Grameenphone reportedly told him the balances had been "flushed" under existing rules. He asked the BTRC to clarify whether operators are allowed to remove balances for not recharging in time.

Alam also raised concerns over rising call and data prices. He noted that the minimum call rate has increased from 25 paisa to 45 paisa over the last decade, and said short calls of around 20 seconds sometimes cost more than Tk 2.

READ MORE ON B3

Default loans hit 34%, highest in 25 years

NPLs reach their highest level since 2000, reflecting irresponsible lending and political influence under the previous regime

MD MEHEDI HASAN

Defaulted loans in the country's banking sector reached 34.6 percent of all disbursed credit till June this year, the highest level since 2000, exposing the fragile state of the banking system and renewing concerns about financial governance.

The non-performing loan (NPL) ratio stood at 24.6 percent in March this year. A year earlier in June, it was only 12.2 percent, according to a quarterly report by the Bangladesh Bank (BB).

At the end of June this year, total loans and advances amounted to Tk 17,34,200 crore. Of this, Tk 5,99,964 crore had turned sour.

Although the central bank did not mention the bad loan amount directly, its quarterly estimates show that defaulted loans made up 34.6 percent of all disbursed credit.

Bad loans stood at Tk 2,11,391 crore in June last year. This means defaults rose by Tk 3,88,573 crore within twelve months.

BB officials said distressed assets, a term that covers bad loans, written off loans, rescheduled loans, and loans locked in money loan court, could cross Tk 10,00,000 crore.

According to them, the sharp rise in bad loans points to widespread irregularities, scams, and weak oversight throughout the 16-year Awami League regime.

In 1999, bad loans in the banking sector stood at a record 41.1 percent, the highest on record. Since then, the ratio began to decline and fell to 6.1 percent in 2011. After that, the NPL ratio started rising again.

Several shariah-based banks linked to S Alam Group, a business conglomerate long surrounded by controversy, have seen sharp increases in defaulted loans, according to BB officials.

They also said politically connected businesses with ties to the previous ruling party influenced lending decisions in a number of banks.

Big borrowers, such as S Alam Group and Beximco Group, defaulted on a large scale after the fall of the Awami League government in August last year. This contributed to an unprecedented jump in defaults across the sector.

"Nearly 35 percent of loans are now classified as non-performing, a level that has far-reaching effects," said Toufic Ahmad Choudhury, former director general of the Bangladesh Institute of Bank Management (BIBM).

He said that when defaulted loans rise, banks earn less as they have to set aside larger provisions. This leads to the erosion of their capital base.

"As a result, foreign investors think twice, and international banks raise transaction charges," Choudhury said.

"The country must come out of this situation. Exemplary punishment should be ensured for loan defaulters."

He also said the higher figure partly reflects the central bank's decision to classify loans in line with international standards.

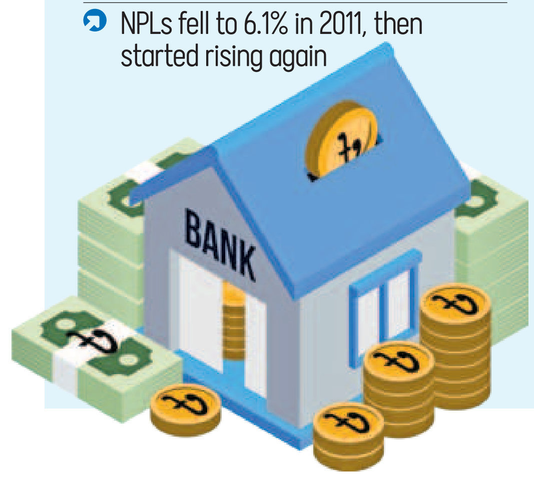
State-owned banks held about Tk 1,52,755 crore in bad loans in June, or 44.6 percent of their total credit, shows the BB report.

Private commercial banks had around

READ MORE ON B3

By the numbers

- Total loans & advances: Tk 17.34 lakh crore (June 2025)
- Bad loans peak: 41.1% of total (1999)
- NPLs fell to 6.1% in 2011, then started rising again



Key point

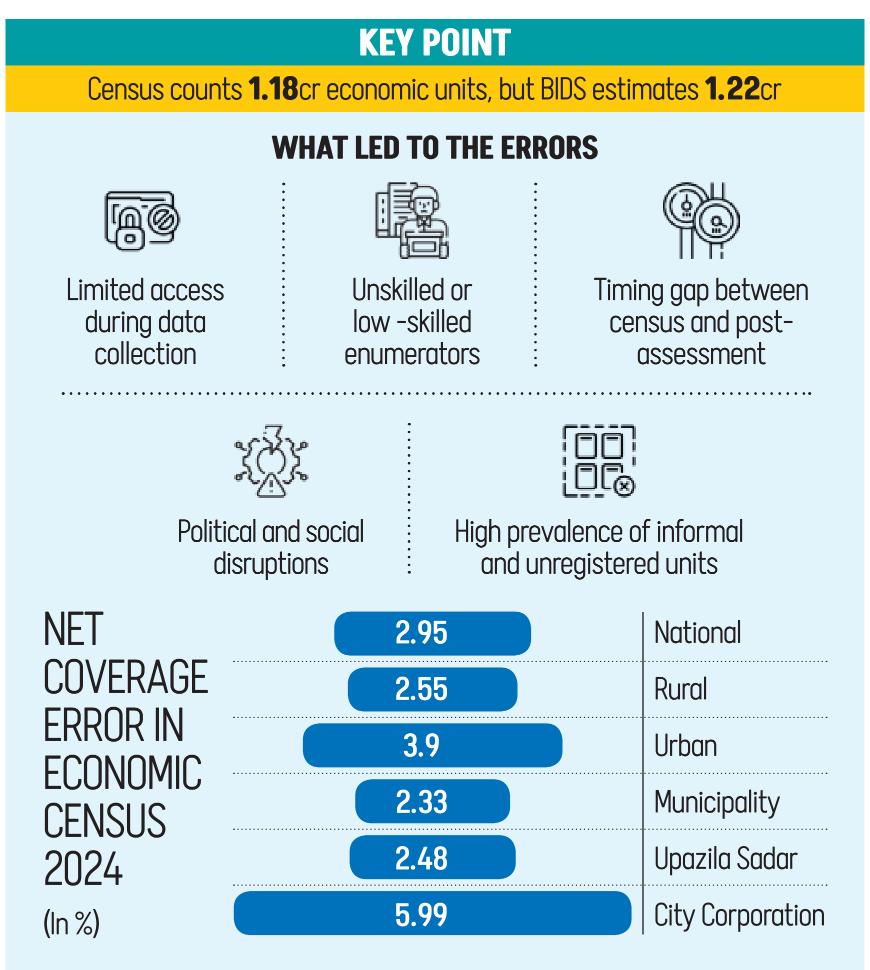
Sharp spike in bad loans seen in S Alam-linked shariah banks and lenders tied to Awami League-backed businesspeople

WHY BAD LOANS INCREASED

Major borrowers stopped repayment after the fall of past govt	Stricter, international-standard loan classification
Lackluster loan recovery amid political uncertainty	Massive loan irregularities during past regime

BBS census missed 3.65 lakh economic units: BIDS

Total economic units stand at 1.22cr



STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Nearly 3.65 lakh economic units were left out of the nationwide enumeration for the Economic Census 2024, according to a post-assessment by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) unveiled yesterday.

The review, conducted as a Post Enumeration Check (PEC), found that the actual number of economic units stood at around 1.22 crore, about 2.95 percent higher than the 1.18 crore counted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) last year.

The PEC, carried out across 352 sample areas, was designed to independently assess the accuracy of the census through a sample survey.

BIDS found that the omissions were unevenly concentrated. City corporation areas recorded the highest gap at 5.99 percent, followed by urban areas at 3.9 percent.

Researchers attributed the shortfall mainly to rapid business turnover, the emergence of new ventures, and a large number of unregistered or temporary establishments, BIDS said at a dissemination seminar at its office yesterday.

Small service-oriented businesses, makeshift stalls, footpath vendors and other informal units were the most frequently missed, while registered establishments were generally captured more consistently.

The PEC also revealed significant mismatches between the BBS census and PEC responses. Fourteen percent discrepancies were observed in establishment type, 8 percent in activity type, 6 percent in

READ MORE ON B3

Remove barriers to private healthcare growth

Experts say

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Business leaders and health experts yesterday urged the government to remove obstacles that hinder the growth of the private sector in healthcare services, medical equipment, and the pharmaceutical industry.

They pointed out the country's heavy dependence on imported raw materials for pharmaceuticals and medical devices while speaking at a seminar, titled "Private Sector Engagement in Health System Development in Bangladesh: Potentiality and Challenges", organised by the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) at its Motijheel office.

They called for business-friendly policies to reduce this dependency and recommended simplifying licensing and renewal processes for private hospitals, medical equipment suppliers, and pharmaceutical companies.

In his keynote speech, Prof Syed Abdul Hamid of the Institute of Health Economics at Dhaka University said, "Our pharmaceutical sector now meets 98 percent of domestic medicine demand, but 90 percent of the raw materials for these drugs have to be imported."

He added, "Around 90 percent of medical equipment, especially high-end devices, is also imported, making the sector heavily dependent on other countries. Yet, tariffs on raw materials are higher than on finished

READ MORE ON B3