



Farmers across the country face fertiliser shortages and inflated prices as dishonest dealers exploit government allocations, leaving winter crops, especially potatoes, undersupplied. The photo was taken in Gaibandha's Gobindaganj upazila yesterday.

PHOTO: MOSTAFA SHABUI

Farmers struggle to buy non-urea fertilisers at govt rates

DAE officials blame dishonest dealers for creating an artificial crisis

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

From the Aman paddy season to the current winter vegetable cultivation, farmers in many districts have been unable to purchase fertilisers at government-fixed prices. Farmers and government officials allege that dishonest traders are exploiting an “artificial crisis,” particularly for non-urea fertilisers, making extra profits while supplies remain insufficient for winter crops. Potato farmers in northern districts are among the worst affected. In Bogura, Gaibandha, Joypurhat, Lalmonirhat, Kurigram, Jamalpur, Mymensingh, Thakurgaon, Panchagarh, Dinajpur, Rajshahi, Kushtia, and Patuakhali, farmers reported paying Tk 200-Tk 600 more per 50kg sack than the government rates for non-urea fertilisers. Shahidul Islam, a farmer from Baneshwar village in Gaibandha's Gobindaganj upazila, said, “I bought a sack of TSP (Triple Super Phosphate) for Tk 1,800, although the government fixed price is Tk 1,350. I also paid Tk 1,500 for DAP (Di-ammonium Phosphate) instead of Tk 1,050. Fertiliser is only available if you pay the dealers extra, and even then, they refuse to give purchase receipts.” Helal Mridha from Rajahar village of the upazila added, “Fertilisers are sold at government rates only when officials raid dealerships. Mobile courts fine the dealers, but they

recover the cost from us. In reality, the punishment falls on farmers. If dealers were jailed instead of just fined, they would not dare to do this again.” Over the past week, farmers in Patgram, Hatibandha, and Kaliganj upazilas of Lalmonirhat, and Nageshwari, Bhurungamari, and Ulipur upazilas of Kurigram blocked roads demanding fertiliser at government-fixed prices, vandalising four fertiliser shops. In response, local administration seized around 12,000 sacks of illegally stockpiled fertiliser, and Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) officials fined five dealers Tk 6 lakh for hoarding. “We blocked roads demanding fertiliser, but we are still not getting it as needed. I am receiving 60 percent less fertiliser than required,” said Sahidar Rahman, 65, from Kaliganj. Subash Chandra Barman, 60, from Raiganj village, Nageshwari, added, “Dealers keep farmers running in circles for a single sack of fertiliser, secretly selling to retailers at higher prices and supplying only small quantities.” **DEALERS DENY OVERPRICING** Abdul Hakim, president of the Lalmonirhat District Fertiliser Dealers Association, said, “Shortages happen because allocations are lower than demand. No dealer sells fertiliser at higher prices, and fertiliser is not sold to anyone other than farmers.” DAE officials described the situation as “artificial,” claiming

some traders are deliberately creating scarcity to make extra profits. “There is no real shortage based on government allocation. Mobile courts are already operating against such practices,” said Md Saykhul Arifin, deputy director of Lalmonirhat DAE. AKM Sadikul Islam, deputy director of Joypurhat DAE, said, “Mobile court drives have been conducted across different upazilas this season to stop overpricing and hoarding. “We fined eight BCIC (Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation) and BADC (Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation) dealers a total of Tk 25,000 for selling fertiliser at inflated prices and keeping illegal stocks.” Bhabesh Sen, 43, from Thakurgaon Sadar, said, “I had to pay Tk 1,800 for each sack of TSP instead of Tk 1,350, and Tk 1,150 for MOP (Muriate of Potash)

instead of Tk 1,000 for my one-acre potato crop.” Arshadul Haque, 35, from Sahapara village in Panchagarh, added, “I could not find TSP at Sakoya Bazar for my Boro seedbed and later had to buy DAP instead.” Sazzad Selim from Rosea village in Panchagarh said, “Each sack of TSP is being sold for Tk 1,900 to Tk 2,000, DAP for Tk 1,400, and MOP for Tk 1,150.” Enamul Haque, a BCIC dealer in Gareya union, Thakurgaon Sadar, denied a shortage, saying, “We are distributing fertilisers to farmers who have been given slips by the agriculture office.” Md Mazedul Islam, deputy director of DAE in Thakurgaon, added, “There is no fertiliser crisis in the markets. Supplies are available.” **PATUAKHALI WATERMELON FARMERS FACE SHORTAGE** In Patuakhali, watermelon farmers are struggling at the

start of the cultivation season. According to the local DAE office, 26,400 tonnes of fertiliser were needed in December, but only 4,242 tonnes have been supplied. Masud Fakir, cultivating watermelon on 3.22 acres in Rangabali, said, “I need at least 40 sacks, but could only buy 10, and at higher prices. I paid Tk 1,500 per sack of urea and TSP instead of the government-fixed Tk 1,350.” Trader Kamal Pasha said, “We are not receiving fertiliser as per our demand. Last week, I requested 200 bags but received only 40.” Aminul Islam, deputy director of DAE in Patuakhali, claimed there is no official report of a fertiliser crisis but promised to take necessary steps. According to the DAE in Kushtia, six upazilas required 5,927 tonnes of TSP, 6,802 tonnes of DAP, and 7,095 tonnes of MOP in December. Only 1,840 tonnes of TSP, 3,432 tonnes of DAP, and 2,331 tonnes of MOP were allocated. Md Showkat Hossain Bhuiyan, deputy director of DAE, said, “The issue was discussed at a recent meeting with higher authorities. Upazila-level officials raised the matter, and discussions are ongoing on whether additional allocations are needed.” *Our correspondents from Lalmonirhat, Jamalpur, Bogura, Rajshahi, Mymensingh, Thakurgaon, Kushtia, and Patuakhali contributed to this report.*

Remittance boom faces an AI test

SALEKEEN IBRAHIM

Considering the core economic indicators of Bangladesh, remittance inflow has become the strongest factor at present, driven by a historic surge. Remittances crossed \$30 billion in the last fiscal year 2024-25, helping to stabilise the exchange rate and bolster foreign currency reserves. The hard-earned money sent by millions of Bangladeshis working abroad, especially in the Middle East, the USA and the UK, has become one of the most dependable sources of foreign earnings for the country. Beneath this encouraging figure, however, lies a serious threat that is rarely discussed or addressed. The Fourth Industrial Revolution, powered by artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics, is changing how we see the world and how it works. For a country like Bangladesh, where remittances largely come from blue-collar workers overseas, this transformation could become a major risk. As robots and AI move beyond manufacturing into construction, logistics and service sectors abroad, Bangladesh's blue-collar diaspora, long seen as the engine of foreign exchange inflows, could see its job base erode. That would leave remittance inflows vulnerable in the years ahead. Researchers suggest that robotics and automation are set to displace jobs. The World Economic Forum “Future of Jobs 2025” report estimates that while AI and information technologies may create 11 million jobs globally, robotics and autonomous systems could lead to a net loss of five million jobs by 2030. The International Labour Organization (ILO) “Generative AI and Jobs” brief suggests that one in four jobs worldwide is at risk of transformation by generative AI alone. For Bangladesh, this is alarming. Many expatriate workers are employed in routine, repetitive or manual roles. If these roles shrink overseas, remittance flows will come under pressure unless the country rethinks its strategy now. Immediate research is needed to avoid future shocks. A detailed study should assess occupational risks by mapping the jobs Bangladeshis migrant workers currently hold abroad, such as construction, services, warehousing and logistics, and estimating how exposed each is to automation and robotics. Based on these findings, an early warning system should be created. If key sectors abroad begin automating rapidly, policymakers must know quickly that labour demand from those channels may fall. At the same time, emphasis should shift from unskilled labour to skilled and semi-skilled workers with future-proof capabilities. Migration pathways linked to robotics maintenance, facility automation support and AI-augmented services should be prioritised. This requires government-funded or subsidised training programmes, ideally in partnership with destination countries, to teach digital skills, automation interfaces and human-robot collaboration. If Bangladeshi workers can move from purely manual roles into human and machine functions, the future of remittances can still be protected. The government should also negotiate bilateral labour migration agreements that focus on emerging service sectors such as caregiving, elderly care, specialised maintenance and smart facility operations, where robotic assistance is less likely to replace humans. Alongside this, investment is needed in automation-resilient domestic sectors, including high-end services, the digital economy, green technology, robot maintenance and AI support industries. Freelancing must be diversified in both geography and skill mix. This offers real potential to earn foreign income while remaining in Bangladesh. Over time, remittance strength will depend increasingly on export performance, making it essential to reduce over-reliance on garments and broaden the export base. Remittances have long been a source of hope, lifting families out of poverty, transforming villages and strengthening foreign reserves. Hope alone, however, cannot secure the future. The world ahead will value skill over strength, adaptability over endurance and knowledge over effort. If Bangladesh acts now by investing in education, digital skills and smarter migration, this challenge can become an opportunity. Machines may be rising, but with foresight and resolve, the country can protect and even strengthen its foreign reserves.

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Global coal demand expected to hit record in 2025: IEA

AFP, Paris

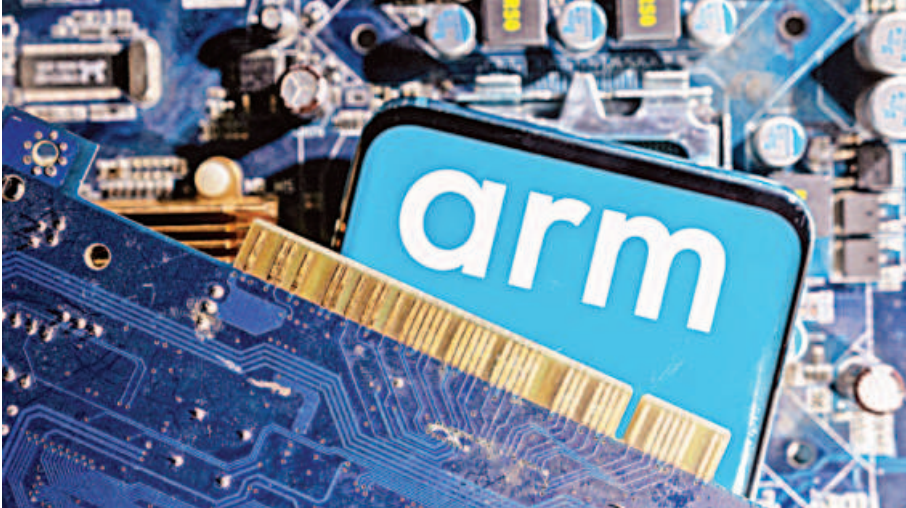
Global coal consumption is expected to hit a record in 2025, the IEA said Wednesday, thanks in part to policy measures introduced by the Trump administration to boost the industry. In its annual report on the coal industry, the International Energy Agency said demand was on course to rise by 0.5 percent this year to hit a record 8.85 billion tonnes, although demand is expected to decline over the rest of the decade as rival generation options multiply. China and India are usually the main drivers of growth in coal consumption as the two emerging economies race to meet rising demand for electricity. But demand for coal, which is the main contributor of climate warming carbon dioxide emissions from human sources, held steady in China and fell in India. The IEA sees demand in China, the top coal consuming nation, decreasing somewhat over the next five years. In India, an early and intense monsoon season gave a boost to hydropower and reduced demand for electricity produced from coal-fired power plants for only the third time in five decades, the IEA said. However, “strong policy support for coal in the United States ... helped lift coal demand there in 2025,” said the IEA. It said US “consumption is poised to increase by eight percent in 2025 amid a combination of higher natural gas prices and a slowdown in the retirement of coal plants due to policy support led by the federal government,” said the IEA. That contrasts to an average drop of six percent per year over the past 15 years.

REUTERS, Hong Kong

The artificial intelligence boom will upend how chips are made. For decades, the majority of the world's semiconductor manufacturers have been built on know-how developed by two players. That is starting to change as companies seek out alternatives, including a promising open-source technology known as RISC-V. Pronounced “risk five”, it's a niche product at present but could have its breakout moment in the year ahead. The two dominant “instruction set architectures” that chipmakers currently use are x86, controlled by Intel, and a competing one owned by UK-based Arm. They're essentially a basic language that determines how processors follow software commands and, in turn, run everything from operating systems and apps to algorithms underlying large language models. As semiconductors become more complex and ubiquitous, charging chip designers to use these proprietary instructions has become a lucrative business. Nearly all smartphone silicon, for instance, is based on Arm architecture; those standards are the reason why developers can easily build

multiple versions of an app for different devices and ecosystems. The company's instruction sets are also increasingly used in data centre central processing units. Thanks to booming demand, its total revenue, mainly from licensing and royalty fees, is on track to hit \$7 billion in the year to March 2028, up from \$4 billion in its 2025 fiscal year, per mean analyst estimates on LSEG. Technology giants, though, are starting to feel uneasy about this dependence

on Arm. One big reason is because the company, which Japan's SoftBank Group acquired in 2016, has chipmaking ambitions and plans to launch a processor, the Financial Times reported, in February, citing sources. This would put Arm in direct competition with many of its customers, including Nvidia and Qualcomm. In a clear sign that tensions are rising, the latter has alleged the British company was restricting access to its technology. That prompted South Korea's antitrust regulator to “inspect” Arm's local offices as part of an inquiry into its licensing practices, Bloomberg reported, in November, citing sources. Meanwhile, Chinese firms are racing to cut their dependence on Western-controlled technology and have embraced open-source alternatives that anyone can freely use, study, modify and share. Washington can't easily restrict access to open-standard architecture like it can with US companies' software and tools. The “biggest advantage” of RISC-V, per a Chinese government report in 2024, is that it is “geopolitically neutral”. Besides state entities and military-linked research institutions, major firms like Alibaba and Huawei are developing RISC-V chips.



A smartphone with a displayed Arm Ltd logo is placed on a computer motherboard in this illustration. Nearly all smartphone silicon is based on Arm architecture; those standards are the reason why developers can easily build multiple versions of an app for different devices and ecosystems.

PHOTO: REUTERS/FILE