

Inflation may fall below 7% by June: govt

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Inflation is expected to fall below 7 percent by June 2026, driven by the Bangladesh Bank's tight monetary policy and the government's austerity measures, the Chief Adviser's Office said yesterday.

Annual average inflation fell below 9 percent in November 2025 for the first time since June 2023, the CA's Office disclosed after a meeting on overall economic progress and budgetary expenditure, chaired by CA Muhammad Yunus at the state guest house Jamuna.

Point-to-point inflation, which crossed 9 percent in March 2023, dropped below that level in June 2025 and declined further to 8.29 percent in November this year, it added.

Finance Adviser Salehuddin Ahmed, Planning Adviser Wahiduddin Mahmud and Bangladesh Bank Governor Ahsan H Mansur were present at the meeting.

The CA's Office acknowledged that real incomes had declined in recent years due to a wide gap between inflation and wage growth, but said the gap had narrowed significantly in recent months.

In November 2025, point-to-point inflation and wage growth stood at 8.29 percent and 8.04 percent, respectively, compared with 9.02 percent and 7.04 percent in fiscal year 2022-23 (FY23).

"As a result, although real income had declined in previous years due to high inflation, the current fiscal year is gradually witnessing an improvement," it said.

The CA's Office also said that due to proper incentives and management, Boro rice yields were good so far this year, and a favourable Aman harvest is expected. As a result, the government's foodgrain procurement target for the current fiscal year is likely to be achieved.

Gross foreign exchange reserves stood at \$32.57 billion, up from around \$25 billion in August 2024.

"With exchange rates stabilising, remittance inflows increasing and interest rates in the financial sector rising significantly, foreign exchange reserves are expected to grow further," it said.

The office added that improved financial management and measures to prevent money laundering have strengthened the country's external account.

Restrictions on imports have been lifted to support more productive economic activity, it said, noting a rebound in imports.

Capital machinery imports, which had been in decline, have regained momentum in the current fiscal year 2025-26.

BRAC Bank launches SME innovation lab

STAR BUSINESS DESK

BRAC Bank PLC has launched the country's first SME innovation lab, titled "Finnovision", aimed at helping small businesses grow and thrive through the adoption of innovative solutions.

The initiative reinforces the bank's pioneering role in strengthening cottage, micro, small and medium enterprises (CMSMEs) through innovation, inclusion and sustainability.

Husne Ara Shikha, executive director of Bangladesh Bank, inaugurated the SME innovation lab as the chief guest at a ceremony held at Lakeshore Hotel Gulshan, in Dhaka on Sunday, according to a press release.

Tareq Refat Ullah Khan, managing director and CEO of BRAC Bank, and Syed Abdul Momen, additional managing director and head of SME Banking, along with development partners and industry stakeholders, were also present.

Finnovision is a dedicated platform designed to test, refine and scale solutions that address contemporary economic, social and environmental challenges faced by CMSMEs.

Harnessing the untapped potential of grassroots entrepreneurs, the lab focuses on four strategic priorities: closing the gender financing gap, fostering smart and

sustainable agriculture, accelerating climate-resilient financing, and integrating cottage and microenterprises into the mainstream economy.

The lab follows a structured, impact-oriented approach, beginning with a comprehensive assessment of CMSME challenges, followed by the launch of problem statements and the shortlisting of enterprises for support.

Selected businesses then enter a bootcamp phase, receiving hands-on training to formalise operations, strengthen bookkeeping, develop realistic cash-flow projections and craft growth strategies.

Promising enterprises progress to a technical assistance phase, where tailored mentorship helps refine prototypes, address implementation challenges and prepare solutions for scale-up.

Leveraging the lab's ecosystem, participants gain access to financial product innovation, channels, markets and financing, while piloting and validating scalable solutions.

The initiative underscores BRAC Bank's long-standing commitment to SMEs and aligns with the founding vision of Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, who established the bank to serve the country's "missing middle" through inclusive banking.

Through collaboration with local and international partners, including DEG Impulse gGmbH, Finnovision aims to unlock new financing models and innovative propositions for grassroots entrepreneurs.



Husne Ara Shikha, executive director of Bangladesh Bank, inaugurates the SME innovation lab, titled "Finnovision", launched by BRAC Bank PLC, at Lakeshore Hotel Gulshan in Dhaka on Sunday.

Employees will also have access to PrimePay,



A key feature of the EPA is that ready-made garments, the main export item of Bangladesh, will enjoy duty-free access to the Japanese market from the first day of implementation.

PHOTO: STAR/FILE

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Bangladesh and Japan have agreed on the draft of a bilateral Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), marking the country's first full-fledged trade deal as it seeks to secure preferential market treatments ahead of its scheduled graduation from the least developed country club next year.

Bangladeshi Commerce Adviser Sk Bashir Uddin and Japanese Foreign Minister Motegi Toshimitsu endorsed the draft during a phone conversation yesterday. The declaration was later announced in both countries through separate press briefings.

Under the draft agreement, Japan will grant duty-free access to 7,379 Bangladeshi products, including ready-made garments, once the EPA is signed. This will cover about 97 percent of the export basket of Bangladesh.

In return, Bangladesh will provide duty-free access to 1,039 Japanese products, largely in phases over 18 years.

A key feature of the EPA is that ready-made garments, the main export item of Bangladesh,

will enjoy duty-free access to the Japanese market from the first day of implementation. The agreement will also allow Single Stage Transformation provisions for garments, easing rules of origin requirements.

The agreement also covers services. Under the trade in services chapter, Bangladesh has agreed to open 97 sub-sectors to Japan, while the island nation will open 120 sub-sectors to Bangladesh across four modes of supply.

Provisions on human resources, movement of natural persons and investment are also included, which officials expect will support increased Japanese investment and technology transfer.

After yesterday's endorsement, the final text of the EPA will now be sent to the National Parliament of Japan, the Diet, and the advisory council of Bangladesh for approval.

At the press conference at the commerce ministry, Commerce Adviser Bashir Uddin said eight rounds of negotiations had been held before finalising the draft.

He said the agreement is expected to be

signed by the end of next month.

At the programme, Lutfe Siddiqi, special envoy on international affairs to the chief adviser, said successfully concluding negotiations at this stage was a difficult task and expressed hope that the agreement would deliver tangible gains in trade and investment.

Chowdhury Ashik Mahmud Bin Harun, executive chairman of the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (Bida), said Japanese investment in Bangladesh currently stands at about \$500 million, a small share of Japan's outbound investment.

He said the absence of a formal trade framework had long been cited by Japanese investors and that the EPA could provide a platform to attract greater investment and facilitate future trade agreements.

The Bangladesh-Japan EPA will be the country's first comprehensive trade agreement. So far, Bangladesh has signed only one preferential trade agreement with Bhutan in December 2020, despite negotiating with more than a dozen trading partners.

REHAB fair begins in Dhaka tomorrow

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Real Estate & Housing Association of Bangladesh (REHAB) Fair 2025 will begin tomorrow at the Bangladesh China Friendship Conference Centre in Dhaka and will continue until December 27, featuring 220 stalls.

This year, REHAB has allowed participation from four diamond sponsors, seven gold sponsors, 10 cosponsors, 14 building materials companies, and 12 financial investment institutions, according to a press release.

REHAB President Md Wahiduzzaman said the association has been working as a major partner of the government in infrastructure development. Member institutions have been striving for more than three decades to provide safe housing for present and future generations, he added.

He stressed that housing opportunities must be nondiscriminatory and fair.

Highlighting policy changes, he said the new Detailed Area Plan and Dhaka Metropolitan Building Rules 2025 have removed old complications and inequalities, restoring confidence among real estate traders and stabilising the sector.

He expects attendance at this year's fair to rise due to the three-day holiday, adding that the fair is not just an exhibition but a platform for direct connections between buyers and developers, offering rare opportunities to compare project quality, location, facilities, and investment potential.



Julian Andrin Weber, chairman of Bauwerk Limited, and Md Asif Bin Idrish, senior executive vice-president and head of the emerging market at Prime Bank PLC, pose for a photograph after signing the agreement at the bank's corporate office in Dhaka recently.

PHOTO: PRIME BANK

Prime Bank signs payroll banking deal with Bauwerk

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Prime Bank PLC has signed a payroll banking agreement with Bauwerk Limited, a global provider of technology-led products, systems and services for the construction industry, to offer payroll banking services.

Md Asif Bin Idrish, senior executive vice-president and head of emerging market of Prime Bank PLC, and Julian Andrin Weber, chairman of Bauwerk Limited, signed the agreement at the bank's corporate office in Dhaka recently, according to a press release.

Under the agreement, eligible employees of Bauwerk Limited will enjoy exclusive payroll banking facilities, including salary accounts with competitive rates, dual-currency debit cards with fee waivers and lifestyle benefits, customised loan and credit card facilities, and a wide range of consumer banking products and services on preferential terms.

Employees will also have access to PrimePay,

the bank's omni digital platform, which enables seamless and automated salary disbursement, along with convenient, round-the-clock corporate payment solutions.

Md Enamul Kabir, executive vice-president and regional head of the branch distribution network of Prime Bank; Hasina Fardous, vice-president and head of payroll banking; Mohammed Zubair, vice-president and team head of emerging market; HM Mamun, assistant vice-president and relationship manager of emerging market; and Robiul Alam Iskandar, first assistant vice-president and business development manager of payroll banking, attended the event.

Md Humayun Kabir, head of finance, accounts and company secretary of Bauwerk Limited; Naleen Kaura, general manager; and Md Jishan Rahman, manager of human resources and administration; along with other senior officials from both organisations, were also present.

Crown Cement declares 21% cash dividend

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Crown Cement PLC has declared a 21 percent cash dividend for the year that ended on June 30, 2025.

The declaration was made at the company's 31st annual general meeting (AGM), held virtually yesterday, according to a press release.

Mohammed Jahangir Alam, chairman of Crown Cement PLC, presided over the meeting.

At the AGM, shareholders approved the financial statements along with the auditors' report and the report of the board of directors. The meeting also approved the election and re-election of directors, the appointment of statutory auditors and corporate governance compliance auditors for the year ending June 30, 2026, and the fixation of their remuneration.

Among others, Md Alamgir Kabir, vice-chairman; Molla Mohammad Majnu, managing director; Md Mizanur Rahman Molla, additional managing director; directors Mohammed Almas Shimul, Solaiman Kabir and Mushsharat Mahajabin; independent directors Rahamat Ullah Mohd Dastagir and Barrister Sarowat Siraj; and Masud Khan, chief adviser to the board, attended the meeting.

M Mozharul Islam, senior general manager and company secretary, conducted the AGM.



Mohammed Jahangir Alam, chairman of Crown Cement PLC, presides over the company's 31st annual general meeting yesterday. The meeting declared a 21 percent cash dividend for 2025.

Walton fridge, AC and TV recognised at Best Brand Award 2025

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Walton, a leading electrical and electronics manufacturing conglomerate in Bangladesh, has been honoured with the "Best Brand Award 2025" in three categories – refrigerator, air conditioner and television – at the 17th edition of the award ceremony held at Le Méridien Dhaka on Saturday.

The recognition was conferred based on a nationwide survey, according to a press release.

Md Tanvir Rahman, chief business officer of Walton AC; Tahasinul Haque, chief business officer of Walton Fridge; Md Shahjalal Hossain Limon and Tanvir Anjum, senior executive directors of Walton Hi-Tech; and Zoheb Ahmed, chief market officer, received the awards on behalf of the company.

Expressing gratitude to customers, Walton's chief market officer Zoheb Ahmed said the recognition reaffirmed Walton's position as the country's leading refrigerator, air conditioner and television brand.



Walton senior officials pose for a group photograph with the crest of the "Best Brand Award-2025" at Le Méridien Dhaka on Saturday.

PHOTO: WALTON

distributors, dealers, members and well-wishers, Walton's chief market officer Zoheb Ahmed said the recognition reaffirmed Walton's position as the country's leading refrigerator, air conditioner and television brand. "Walton is moving forward with the vision of turning Bangladesh into a manufacturing hub for artificial intelligence (AI) and internet of things (IoT)-based innovative electronic appliances, while placing Walton among the top global electronics brands," he said. To realise this vision, Walton has been

introducing advanced AI and IoT-based technologies and features in its smart refrigerators, air conditioners, televisions and other appliances. Through exports, the company has already expanded its global footprint to more than 50 countries.

"Upholding this prestigious best brand recognition in the domestic refrigerator, AC and TV segments will further accelerate Walton's progress in the global market," he added.

The awards were determined using the globally recognised "Winning Brands" survey methodology, with participation from consumers across the country.

This year, 45 brands across 45 categories were honoured at the "Best Brand Award 2025", organised by the Bangladesh Brand Forum in partnership with nSearch Ltd.