

## NEIR goes live today

Only new unauthorised handsets to be blocked

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The National Equipment Identity Register (NEIR) system will be activated today, bringing unauthorised new handsets that connect to the network under the blocking process.

Earlier, the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) postponed the launch and extended the deadline for mobile handset dealers to submit information on unsold or stable devices until December 31, 2025.

"No handset, authorised or unauthorised, currently connected to the network will be blocked. Even the unsold stock held by traders, whose handset IMEI (International Mobile Equipment Identity) lists have been submitted to the BTRC, will not be blocked," said Major General (ret'd) Md Emdad ul Bari, chairman of BTRC.

"Only new phones that connect to the network will be affected," a BTRC official said.

Expatriates will be allowed to bring two new handsets in addition to their used one, and will have a three-month grace period to register them with NEIR. During this period, the handsets will not be blocked. These handsets can be registered in the NEIR using travel documents.

"The NEIR will be activated if the advisory council reduces the import and production duties of handsets on Thursday," said Faiz Ahmad Taiyeb, special assistant to the chief adviser with executive authority over posts, telecom, and ICT.

Previously, the Posts and Telecommunications Division granted a three-month delay to NEIR launch after handset sellers, affected by the blocking of grey-market devices, staged a protest at the Karwan Bazar intersection in Dhaka on December 10, which brought traffic to a standstill.

However, a BTRC official said the commission has not yet been officially informed about this decision.



A roadside stall in Rajshahi city displays stacks of comforters and blankets as winter bedding sees strong demand. The photo was taken yesterday.  
PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

# Comforters replacing blankets as urban winter favourite

JAGARAN CHAKMA

When Rumana Parveen Rinky, a private jobholder, went shopping for winter essentials this year, she opted for something new – a comforter.

"It's light, washable, and easy to use," she said, explaining the reason behind switching from the heavy blanket she used in previous winters. "Blankets are often too warm for Dhaka's winter. The comforter, on the other hand, is just right."

Rinky represents a growing group of urban consumers who are choosing comforters as a convenient and cost-effective alternative to traditional quilts (locally known as lep) or imported blankets. "Even the price of a comforter is lower than a blanket," she added, highlighting a key factor for many middle-income families.

With local brands increasing production and offering a wide range of designs at competitive prices, industry insiders say comforters are not just a passing trend but a long-term change in how urban Bangladesh keeps warm in winter.

Market insiders say the comforter market size is within Tk 200 crore, as it is still largely urban-centric.

With temperatures falling during cold waves, comforter sales have surged. PRAN-RFL Group reported a 40 percent year-on-year growth during this season so far.

"This year, we have seen a stronger response than in previous winters. People now clearly understand the value of comforters," said Kamruzzaman

Kamal, marketing director of Pran-RFL Group. He attributed the growth to the cold wave affecting Dhaka and other urban centres.

Pran-RFL, the country's largest local comforter manufacturer, produces about 5,000 units daily, priced between Tk 1,300 and Tk 3,000.

"People traditionally used cotton quilts or imported blankets from China, Korea, and Thailand. Comforters are gradually replacing those because they are more practical," Kamal said.

He added that comforters are likely to become the standard winter sleeping arrangement in Bangladesh.

While Pran-RFL leads the market, several home textile firms and cushion manufacturers have also entered the segment. Imported comforters and pillows continue to supplement the local supply.

However, Md Musa, owner of Musa Bedding in Uttara Sector 3, acknowledged that comforter demand is gradually rising, but noted that many customers still prefer traditional quilts during peak winter.

"We sell both imported and locally made comforters. Their prices are generally lower than traditional quilts, which makes them an attractive option for cost-conscious buyers," he added.

"Over the past five to six years, we've seen a clear shift. While people in rural areas once used simple cotton layers for warmth, comforters are now becoming the preferred choice," said M Shahadat Hossain Sohel, president of the Bangladesh Terry Towel and Linen Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

He said comforters are a modern upgrade of traditional quilts, made with advanced materials and technology. In global markets, poly-cotton fabrics with 8 to 12 ounces of padding are standard. Bangladeshi manufacturers have adopted similar methods, using locally produced padding to meet rising demand.

Major players like Youngone and Devonair have strengthened the local supply chain by producing high-quality padding materials. "This has enabled many companies to serve both domestic and export markets," he added.

"Comforters are no longer limited to Dhaka or other big cities. They are reaching villages as well, thanks to local production and better distribution," Sohel said.

"Bangladeshi entrepreneurs are quick to adapt to trends. What we're seeing now in the comforter industry reflects that adaptability," he added.

Md Naim Hossain, an accountant at a comforter shop on Uttara's Jashim Uddin Road, said that demand for comforters has risen sharply this winter.

He said the store has sold several thousand comforters in the past one and a half months, showing strong seasonal demand.

"Home textile manufacturers now offer a wide range of comforters, from regular to premium quality," he said. "Prices usually range between Tk 3,000 and Tk 6,500, and they can be washed with normal water or in a washing machine, which makes them very convenient."

## 700MHz auction: One operator can get up to 60% of total spectrum

MAHMUDUL HASAN

The Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) has recently amended its rules for the upcoming auction of the 700-megahertz (MHz) band, allowing a single mobile operator to acquire up to 60 percent of the spectrum available in the auction.

Under the revised guidelines, if only one operator participates, it may be awarded up to 15MHz out of the total 25MHz on offer.

Currently, the country's largest mobile operator, Grameenphone (GP), and the second-largest, Robi Axiata, have applied to take part in the auction scheduled for January 14. However, Robi has requested a one-month extension. Banglalink, the third-largest operator, and state-owned Teletalk have not applied.

"We have submitted our application as per the instructions. We are now waiting for BTRC's response," said Tanveer Mohammad, chief corporate affairs officer of Grameenphone.

Spectrum is a range of electromagnetic frequencies that telecom operators use to transmit mobile calls, internet data, and other wireless services. These frequencies are divided into bands, each with different technical characteristics that affect coverage, speed, and signal quality.

The 700MHz band is widely regarded as a high-value or "golden" spectrum because it offers wide coverage, strong indoor penetration, and lower network deployment costs compared to higher-frequency bands.

These features make it suitable for both rural and urban areas and for improving the quality and reach of 4G and future 5G services.

**OBJECTIONS OVER AUCTION FRAMEWORK, PRICING**

Robi has complained that the current approach to auctioning the spectrum does not reflect market reality and is not inclusive.

"The proposed spectrum auction overlooks two critical issues – market competition and customer affordability," said Shahed Alam, chief corporate and regulatory officer, Robi Axiata PLC.

**Currently, Grameenphone and Robi Axiata have applied to take part in the auction scheduled for January 14. However, Robi has requested a one-month extension**

"We believe spectrum, as a national resource, should not remain unsold. At the same time, customers of operators not participating in this auction must not be deprived of spectrum access later, which is essential for quality service nationwide," he added.

Alam also said that the current pricing assumes all operators will participate, which may not reflect market conditions and could discourage competition.

He urged the regulator to adopt a more inclusive and sustainable approach that ensures competition, affordability, and optimal spectrum use, suggesting the auction should be rescheduled until the remaining spectrum is made available.

The government has approved a 10 percent reduction in the base price of the 700MHz band. Even after the cut, operators say the spectrum is still expensive. The base price is now Tk 237 crore per MHz for a 15-year licence, down from Tk 263 crore per MHz.

Faiz Ahmad Taiyeb, special assistant to the chief adviser for telecom and ICT, earlier said the government had directed the BTRC to revise the price after receiving requests from telecom investors.

He also noted that under the existing telecom policy, operators may qualify for an additional 20 percent discount if they meet network rollout targets within the first two years of allocation.

Banglalink, however, said its decision not to participate was driven by concerns over the auction framework as well as broader industry challenges.

"We decided not to participate due to the high spectrum price and an auction framework that limits fair competition," said Taimur Rahman, chief corporate and regulatory affairs officer of Banglalink.

"This decision also reflects broader challenges in the country's telecom sector, including one of the highest taxation rates globally, where taxes account for nearly 55 percent of industry revenue, and an unpredictable regulatory environment that discourages investment and diversification," he added.

Rahman also said the 700MHz band typically requires at least 10MHz per operator to deliver meaningful performance improvements, and that the proposed 25MHz structure effectively limits participation to two operators.

He added that alternative low-frequency bands, such as the 900MHz EGSM band, could provide a more cost-effective option for expanding coverage and improving service quality.

## Nazmul Huda Sarkar becomes DMD of Midland Bank

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Midland Bank PLC has promoted Md Nazmul Huda Sarkar to the post of deputy managing director (DMD), effective from January 1, 2026.

Prior to this promotion, Sarkar was serving the bank as senior executive vice-president and chief technology officer, according to a press release.

He served at Mutual Trust Bank PLC and played a key role in the bank's transition to a new digital platform.

He also worked in Japan with Match.com as a senior application engineer.

He previously worked at Fujitsu, Nissan Motor, IDLC Finance PLC, and National Life Insurance.



Md Nazmul Huda Sarkar

## Jafar Sadeq made DMD of Shahjalal Islami Bank

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Shahjalal Islami Bank PLC has promoted Md Jafar Sadeq to the post of deputy managing director (DMD).

Prior to this promotion, Sadeq was serving the bank as senior executive vice-president and chief financial officer.

He began his professional career in 2002 with Hoda Vasi Chowdhury (HVC), Chartered Accountants.

He commenced his banking career with ONE Bank PLC, according to a press release. He later joined Shahjalal Islami Bank PLC in 2006 in the financial administration division.

Sadeq holds a master's degree in accounting from Jagannath University.



Md Jafar Sadeq

## Prime Bank clients to get discounts on Fair Face apartments

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Prime Bank PLC has entered into a strategic partnership agreement with Fair Face Holdings Limited, one of the leading real estate developers in Bangladesh, to offer discounts on apartment purchases for its customers.

Mamur Ahmed, senior executive vice-president and head of branch distribution at Prime Bank PLC, and Nur Alam Shaikh, managing director of Fair Face Holdings Limited, signed the agreement at the bank's corporate office in Dhaka recently, according to a press release.

Under this collaboration, Prime Bank customers will enjoy a 5 percent discount on flat purchases from Fair Face Holdings. This benefit is designed to make homeownership more accessible and affordable for the bank's customers.

Through this partnership, Prime Bank reinforces its commitment to delivering lifestyle-driven financial solutions that add value to its customers' aspirations and enhance their overall banking experience, the release added.



Nur Alam Shaikh, managing director of Fair Face Holdings Limited, and Mamur Ahmed, senior executive vice-president and head of branch distribution at Prime Bank PLC, pose for photographs after signing an agreement at the bank's corporate office in Dhaka recently.  
PHOTO: PRIME BANK

## GPH Ispat declares 5% cash dividend

STAR BUSINESS DESK

GPH Ispat Limited yesterday declared a 5 percent cash dividend for the financial year (FY) that ended on June 30, 2025.

The declaration was made at the company's 19th annual general meeting (AGM), held virtually, according to a press release.

Md Alamgir Kabir, chairman of GPH Ispat Limited, presided over the meeting as the chief guest.

In his address, Kabir said that despite a challenging operating environment marked by economic volatility, rising bank interest rates, and inflation during FY2024-25, GPH Ispat remained focused on improving production efficiency, controlling costs, and maintaining the highest standards of product quality.

He added that the company would continue to prioritise innovation, research and development, quality assurance, and customer satisfaction to support sustainable growth and long-term value creation for shareholders.

Md Mosharraf Hossain, company secretary, conducted the meeting.



Md Alamgir Kabir, chairman of GPH Ispat Limited, virtually presides over the company's 19th annual general meeting yesterday. The meeting declared a 5 percent cash dividend for 2025.  
PHOTO: GPH ISPAT

## Gold rebounds on int'l market

REUTERS

Precious metals rebounded on Tuesday, after falling sharply in the previous session, as the market refocused on geopolitical and economic risks, reigniting gold's rally to cap its best year since 1979.

Spot gold rose 0.8 percent to \$4,364.70 per ounce at 2:07 pm ET (1907 GMT).

On Monday, it recorded its biggest daily percentage loss since October 21 as profit-taking pushed it down from Friday's record high of \$4,549.71. US gold futures settled 1 percent higher at \$4,386.30.

"We saw very extreme volatility yesterday where we saw strong action in Asian trading to the upside and then rather substantial profit-taking... but things have stabilised somewhat today, the trade remains generally favourable," said Peter Grant, vice-president and senior metals strategist at Zaner Metals.

Gold, seen as a safe-haven asset, has surged 66 percent in 2025 – its steepest climb since 1979 – propelled by a perfect storm of interest rate easing, geopolitical flashpoints, robust central bank purchases and flows into bullion-backed ETFs.