

Mashrur Arefin, Ahsan Zaman elected ABB chairman, secretary general

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Mashrur Arefin, managing director and CEO of City Bank PLC, and Ahsan Zaman Chowdhury, managing director and CEO of Trust Bank PLC, have been elected chairman and secretary general, respectively, of the Association of Bankers, Bangladesh (ABB) for a two-year term (2026-27).

The leadership team was elected at the association's 28th annual general meeting, held recently in Dhaka, according to a press release.

With more than 31 years of banking experience, Arefin has been leading City Bank for the past seven years.

He previously served as interim chairman of the association for seven months and currently chairs the SWIFT Members & Users Group in Bangladesh.

Chowdhury began his professional banking career at AB Bank Limited

in 1986 and later joined Eastern Bank Limited in 1998. He has been serving as managing director and chief executive officer of Trust Bank since July 2024.

Hassan O Rashid, managing director and chief executive officer of Prime Bank PLC; Mohammad Ali, managing director and chief executive officer of Pubali Bank PLC; and Mohammad Mamdudur Rashid, managing director and chief executive officer of United Commercial Bank PLC, were also elected vice-chairmen of the association.

Tarek Reaz Khan, managing director and chief executive officer of NRB Bank PLC, and Mirza Elias Uddin Ahmed, managing director and chief executive officer of Jamuna Bank PLC, were elected treasurer and joint secretary, respectively.

The meeting also elected 12 bank managing directors and chief executive officers as members of ABB's board of governors.



The newly elected committee of the Association of Bankers, Bangladesh, led by its chairman Mashrur Arefin, poses for a group photograph after the association's 28th annual general meeting in Dhaka recently. PHOTO: CITY BANK



Munia Ghani, head of partnership and marketing at Grameenphone Limited, and HM Mostafizur Rahman, head of the retail business division of Dhaka Bank PLC, pose for a photograph after signing the memorandum of understanding in Dhaka recently. PHOTO: DHAKA BANK

Grameenphone clients to get auto loans from Dhaka Bank

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Dhaka Bank PLC has entered into a strategic partnership agreement with the country's leading mobile operator, Grameenphone Limited, through the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU).

HM Mostafizur Rahman, head of the retail business division of Dhaka Bank PLC, and Munia Ghani, head of partnership and marketing at Grameenphone Limited, signed the MoU in Dhaka recently, according to a press release.

Under the collaboration, GPStar Signature and Platinum customers will gain access to Dhaka Bank auto loans with exclusive privileges, preferential interest

rates and attractive value-added benefits. As part of the agreement, Dhaka Bank is introducing a dedicated car loan package for GPStar Signature and Platinum customers with enhanced features.

The facility will support financing for both brand-new and pre-owned vehicles, making car ownership simpler and more affordable. The partnership aims to ensure a seamless and hassle-free auto financing experience for customers, enhancing convenience while expanding access to premium automobile ownership.

The collaboration also reinforces Dhaka Bank's commitment to delivering innovative retail banking solutions and strengthening its footprint in the consumer finance segment.

Dollar rallies

REUTERS, Tokyo

The dollar started the first full trading week of 2026 with a broad rally, climbing to a 3-1/2-week peak versus the euro and hitting two-week highs against the yen, Swiss franc and Canadian dollar.

Currency traders largely looked past the United States' weekend raid in Venezuela and the capture of President Nicolas Maduro, focusing instead on a slate of US macroeconomic indicators due this week that could be crucial in steering Federal Reserve policy.

The dollar advanced 0.3 percent to \$1.1682 per euro, after earlier touching its strongest level since December 10 at \$1.1672.

It climbed as high as 157,295 yen, 0.7951 Swiss franc and CSI.37771, all of which were the highest levels since December 22.

"I dare say the FX complex is not much of a reflection of risks stemming from Venezuela, but more about what the US data is going to tell us about the Fed's policy path," said Kyle Rodda, senior financial markets analyst at Capital.com.

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A recent run of resilient US data has markets contemplating a potentially slower pace of interest rate cuts this year, he said.

The data rollout this week begins with ISM manufacturing figures on Monday and culminates with the monthly non-farm payrolls report on Friday. Traders currently expect two US rate cuts this year, according to LSEG calculations based on futures.

Investors are also awaiting US President Donald Trump's choice for the next Fed chair, with Jerome Powell's term ending in May. Trump has said he will announce his pick this month, and has said Powell's successor will be "someone who believes in lower interest rates, by a lot."

Meanwhile, Bank of Japan Governor Kazuo Ueda said on Monday that the central bank will continue to raise rates if economic and price developments move in line with its forecasts. It is a view he has reiterated several times in recent months, including after December's as-expected decision to raise rates to a three-decade high.

UCB saw Tk 13,000cr deposit growth in 2025

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United Commercial Bank PLC (UCB) posted a year-on-year deposit growth of nearly Tk 13,000 crore in 2025, more than three times the Tk 4,082 crore recorded a year earlier.

The surge marks the highest deposit growth in the bank's history, according to a press release.

To celebrate the milestone, UCB organised events across its branches and offices nationwide, bringing employees together to mark the achievement. Sharif Zahir, chairman of United Commercial Bank PLC, inaugurated the celebrations as the chief guest.

"The nearly Tk 13,000 crore deposit growth clearly reflects our customers'

unwavering confidence in UCB," Zahir said. "While this trust is a great source of pride, it also comes with significant responsibility."

He added that during the year the bank financed exports worth around \$3.3 billion and a nearly equal volume of imports, demonstrating UCB's resilience despite a challenging dollar market. Zahir also thanked the bank's employees for their contribution to the milestone.

Mohammad Mamdudur Rashid, managing director and chief executive officer, said the achievement reflected the professionalism, integrity and collective commitment of the bank's workforce.

"When numbers speak for themselves and trust becomes the strongest

foundation, success naturally follows," he said, adding that the bank would continue to focus on customer-centric banking, disciplined risk management and sustainable growth.

UCB also reported a sharp expansion of its customer base. While 4.11 lakh new accounts were opened in 2024, the number rose to 6.78 lakh in 2025, underscoring growing public confidence in the bank's financial strength and service quality.

At the same time, the bank strengthened its financial discipline by reducing its advance-to-deposit ratio from 91.30 percent in 2024 to 83 percent in 2025, reflecting improved liquidity management and enhanced financial stability.



Mohammad Mamdudur Rashid, managing director and chief executive officer of United Commercial Bank PLC, inaugurates a programme at the bank's head office in Dhaka yesterday to celebrate the achievement. PHOTO: UCB

Gain and pain will battle for leading role in 2026

REUTERS, London

The world economy is making a surprising habit of shrugging off unpleasant shocks. Since 2020, the planet has weathered a global pandemic, inflation, sharply rising interest rates, and the outbreak of war without a major slump. In 2025, a tsunami of enthusiasm about artificial intelligence offset the disruptive effects of US President Donald Trump's trade turmoil, keeping economies and financial markets humming. Opposing forces are preparing to battle for supremacy again in 2026. The stage is set for a turbulent contest between gain and pain.

The incredible resilience of global commerce and finance was on full display after Trump returned to the Oval Office in early 2025. He quickly delivered the tariff shock that many had assumed was an elaborate bluff, took a chainsaw to Washington bureaucracy, alienated close US allies, and attacked the independence of the Federal Reserve. Yet an extraordinary splurge of investment in data centres and other AI-related infrastructure, combined with the confidence-boosting powers of a rising stock market, proved a more potent economic force, again defying predictions of an inflation shock or a downturn.

Indeed, occasional observers of financial markets could be forgiven for not noticing much change. In the final weeks of 2025, the yield on 10-year US Treasury bonds was hovering around 4 percent - slightly lower than at the time of Trump's re-election a year earlier. The S&P 500 Index had gained roughly 15 percent, even as it underperformed equity benchmarks in Seoul, Hong Kong, Tokyo, Frankfurt, Rome and even London. A weaker dollar and soaring gold price were the only visible reminders of cracks in the financial order.

The year ahead promises to be another heavyweight wrestling match. In one corner is the world economy, which most forecasters expect will keep growing steadily, helped by the stimulus provided by Trump's Big

Beautiful Bill, the promise of lower interest rates, continued AI spending, and possible peace in Ukraine.

In the other corner lies a gang of disruptive risks. These include disillusionment over AI, Trump installing an easy-money sycophant at the Fed, dysfunctional politics across the West, creaking corporate credit, an increasingly confident China and Russia, and the ever-present possibility of financial gravity reasserting itself over historically high equity valuations.

This is the uncertain backdrop against which Breakingviews columnists embarked on their annual exercise of making predictions for the year ahead. It is not a dry forecasting exercise but an attempt to sketch out some thought-provoking and perhaps unexpected scenarios that might materialise in 2026.

Though the primary goal is to be interesting rather than 100 percent

accurate, some of our calls for 2025 came good. Trump faced an early showdown with the bond markets, but backed down when the tariff-induced selloff proved too sharp. Germany's new chancellor relaxed the country's debt brake. Mike Henry, the boss of mining giant BHP, briefly renewed his interest in rival Anglo American. Google owner Alphabet splashed out \$32 billion on cybersecurity firm Wiz, as foretold by our columnists.

Other predictions proved wide of the mark, or at least premature. OpenAI did not launch an IPO in 2025, though the inventor of ChatGPT remains a strong contender for a stock market listing. Intel did not succumb to a takeover but did welcome the US government as a shareholder. And while California did not secede from the Union, Governor Gavin Newsom emerged as a robust critic of Trump's administration.

Heading into 2026, the world economy is benefiting from several powerful following winds. The US government is still in stimulus mode. The AI investment bonanza continues and is spreading to previously dull utilities. Thousands of fans from around the planet are due to attend soccer's World Cup - assuming Trump lets them in. Provided inflation does not pick up - a big if - interest rates can fall further, helping bond investors overcome their misgivings about government debt. (Japan will once again be the exception.)

Other positive impulses will be China's crackdown on irrational competition and overcapacity, which should shore up corporate profits in the world's second-largest economy. Resurgent corporate dealmaking could deliver the largest-ever M&A transaction. The markets for liquefied natural gas and battery technology

are heading for oversupply, to the delight of buyers. For purveyors of private credit, the biggest threat is less of corporate blowups than a future of more humdrum returns.

Yet many lurking dangers could derail this optimistic scenario. Increased state meddling in business is inevitable, with Boeing a strong candidate to become the next ailing American corporate champion to receive a US government investment. Excessive speculation in cryptocurrencies and rampant self-dealing by Trump's family and members of his administration could combine to deliver a government bailout of digital tokens. A ceasefire in Ukraine will only embolden Russian President Vladimir Putin, who will test the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's resolve, in turn spurring mergers among defence contractors.

Meanwhile, 2026 is shaping up to be a pivotal year for AI. Chatbot innovation will stimulate the development of devices that respond to the human voice, rather than the swipe of a thumb. The excitement may tempt Marc Andreessen, whose IPO of Netscape defined the dotcom frenzy of the 1990s, to repeat the trick by seeking a stock market listing for his venture capital firm.

But self-teaching computers will also inflict pain. The technology will turn prospective students away from college degrees, while lawyers will have a field day litigating the many ways in which large language models have infringed intellectual property. Oracle boss Larry Ellison's aggressive debt-fuelled attempt to join the Big Tech gang will backfire. And if the investment boom fizzles, new entrepreneurs will emerge to dream up imaginative new uses for all those data centres.

As in previous years, the latest crop of predictions doubtless includes misses as well as hits. But the process of trying to peer beyond the consensus remains stimulating, and hopefully entertaining. As the world throws up new and unforeseen shocks and surprises, Breakingviews will be here to help make sense of it all.

Vietnam says economy grew 8% in 2025 despite US tariffs

AFP, Hanoi

Vietnam said on Monday its economy grew 8.0 percent last year, thanks to gains in services, construction and exports and despite fresh US tariffs taking effect.

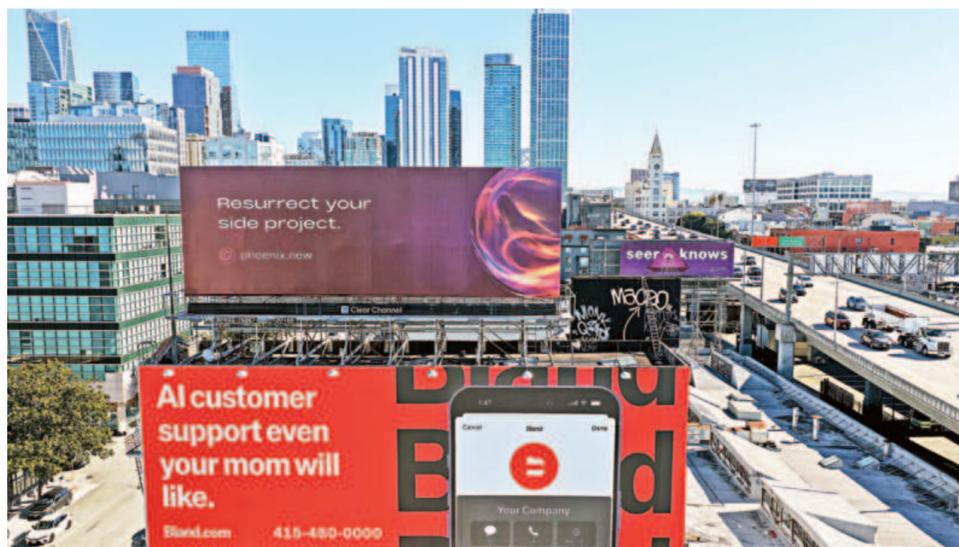
"GDP in 2025 is projected to grow significantly at an estimated rate of 8.02 percent compared to the previous year," the General Statistics Office said in a statement.

Vietnam has long been a success story among Asian economies. Its economy expanded last year despite new trade levies from the United States, its largest export market, on a range of products, including clothing and shoes.

The global manufacturing hub earned about \$475 billion from exports last year, up 17 percent year-on-year, and spent \$455 billion on imports, up 19 percent from 2024, according to the GSO.

Vietnam in July secured a minimum 20 percent tariff with the United States, down from more than 40 percent, in return for opening its market to US products, including cars.

"Despite potential downside risks from tariffs imposed by the US, Vietnam has shown resilience through strong domestic consumption, business investment growth and government spending," said Chad Ovel, a partner at private equity firm Mekong Capital.



A billboard advertising an artificial intelligence company is posted in San Francisco. The AI investment bonanza continues and 2026 is shaping up to be a pivotal year for it. PHOTO: AFP/FILE