

AkijBashir launches country's first three-layer insulated wire

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

AkijBashir Group has officially entered Bangladesh's electrical wire and cable industry with the launch of its new brand, AkijBashir Cables, introducing the country's first three-layer insulated electrical wire.

The announcement was made at a formal ceremony at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in Dhaka yesterday.

The new cables feature a pure copper core with three layers of insulation, designed to provide enhanced safety, durability, and resistance to high temperatures of up to 105 degrees Celsius.

According to company officials, the innovation sets a new benchmark for electrical safety and reliability in the country, especially for residential, commercial, and industrial installations.

The launch was attended by leading industry professionals, business partners, trade leaders, and key stakeholders.

The brand was officially unveiled by Mohammad Khorshed Alam, chief operating officer of AkijBashir Group, alongside other top executives, including Helal Ahmed, deputy managing director, and Mohammad Omar Faruke, Head of Business (Cable Operations).

In his remarks, Alam said AkijBashir Cables reflects the group's longstanding commitment to quality and innovation.



Mohammad Khorshed Alam, chief operating officer of AkijBashir Group, poses for a group photograph after unveiling the group's new business unit, AkijBashir Cables, at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Center in Dhaka yesterday. PHOTO: AKIJBASHIR GROUP

"With our advanced manufacturing capabilities and trusted market presence, we are confident AkijBashir Cables will emerge as a reliable solution for modern electrical needs," he said.

The company has already opened 32 showrooms across Bangladesh to ensure immediate product availability and customer access. The brand's tagline, "Confidence Within," highlights its focus

on safety, performance, and trust.

Alam added that AkijBashir Cables aims to deliver secure, efficient, and future-ready electrical solutions through its nationwide distribution network.

Improved corporate culture can reduce insider trading: experts

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Improved corporate culture at listed companies can help reduce the practice of making profit through insider trading, experts said yesterday.

Insider trading refers to the buying or selling of a company's securities by individuals who possess material, non-public information about the company.

The remarks were made at an event at Dhaka University. Ahsan Habib, professor of financial accounting at Massey University in New Zealand, presented the keynote paper.

Habib discussed recent empirical findings on insider trading profitability, the role of corporate governance mechanisms, and the importance of corporate culture in ensuring fair and transparent capital markets.

He said improvements in corporate culture reduce the profitability of insider trading, which in turn discourages such practices.

As a result, he stressed the need to place greater emphasis on strengthening corporate culture alongside regulatory measures.

The research seminar on corporate culture and insider trading was organised by the Accounting Research Initiative of the Department of Accounting.

Maksudur Rahman Sarker, chairperson of the Department of Accounting at the University of Dhaka, inaugurated the seminar.

Bangladesh remains cash-heavy despite digital gains: PRI

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh has made notable progress in digital payments, yet it remains largely cash-dependent due to constraints, including limited interoperability, infrastructure gaps, cybersecurity risks, and low digital literacy, said the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh (PRI) yesterday.

The research organisation shared the findings at a workshop on formulating a national strategic roadmap to move toward a cashless economy at its Dhaka office.

PRI said progress in cashless payments has been led by mobile financial services, quick response (QR) code-based payments, and online banking.

The cashless agenda must now be elevated to a national development priority, said PRI Principal Economist Ashikur Rahman, presenting a keynote at the event.

He said digital and cashless instruments are no longer

peripheral innovations; they are powerful enablers of financial inclusion, economic governance, and a low-transaction-cost economy.

"When designed and deployed well, they can extend formal financial services to underserved populations, reduce informality, improve transparency, and strengthen state capacity.

"If Bangladesh is to sustain inclusive growth in an increasingly digital global economy, the transition to cashless finance must be deliberate, coordinated, and time-bound," he added.

Arief Hossain Khan, executive director of Bangladesh Bank (BB), said the central bank is actively pursuing initiatives to promote digital payments, financial inclusion, and a secure payment ecosystem.

"Success in our transition toward a cashless economy depends on strong coordination among regulators, financial institutions,

and technology providers to ensure it is inclusive for all," he said.

PRI Chairman Zaidi Sattar said three factors determine economic growth: labour force growth, capital investment, and productivity growth.

"The cashless economy contributes to productivity growth, but the valuations generated within the cashless economy must be captured."

To reflect digital advancements in national production, the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) needs to adopt the UN System of National Accounts (UN SNA) 2025 to appropriately incorporate the value added by digital and cashless transactions into GDP growth, he added.

"This process will take at least three years. Cooperation among the Bangladesh Bank, BBS, and research organisations will be required, including access to relevant data from the BB," he said.

Uneasy recovery: strong reserves

FROM PAGE B1

that the pressure on the export sector is unlikely to lift anytime soon, reflecting both cyclical and longer-term challenges in global trade.

The causes of this malaise are both external and domestic. The external world is no longer the reliable partner it once was.

"There is no credible signal that the global trading environment will turn supportive any time soon. It remains unfavourable, fragmented, and highly unpredictable," Razzaque added.

"There is no indication that the global trading environment will improve. It remains unfavourable and unpredictable," Razzaque added. The shifting tectonic plates of international commerce — specifically the impact of increased US reciprocal tariffs, the opacity of American trade policy, and an increasingly complex geopolitical landscape are reshaping trade flows and investment decisions, with adverse implications for export-dependent economies such as Bangladesh.

In the United States, a newly protectionist mood has taken a heavy toll on the global economy. Following the imposition of an additional 20 percent tariff, prices for Bangladeshi apparel rose, and American demand predictably softened. Closer to home, a logistical severing occurred last year when India removed transshipment benefits for Bangladesh's exports to third countries. The result was an immediate increase in lead times and delayed deliveries, prompting unsentimental foreign buyers to shift their orders to alternative suppliers.

Razzaque also points to specific unknowns that complicate the calculus for Dhaka, particularly regarding its neighbours.

"We do not know how US tariff policy towards India or for any other country will evolve, and that uncertainty matters for Bangladesh's competitive position in key markets," he said.

"Taken together, these unresolved policy issues and extremely volatile global geopolitical landscape

suggest a period of heightened uncertainty in the global trading system, an assessment widely shared by economists working on applied international trade and development."

Domestic headwinds have been equally fierce. Political uncertainty, coupled with interest-rate hikes designed to curb inflation, has driven up the cost of doing business, eroding price competitiveness.

This is concerning, even though the economy had, until recently, shown genuine signs of recovery. Imports, after two years of contraction, had finally rebounded in 2025, posting a 2 percent increase — usually a signal of industrial vitality. Private investment, too, seemed to be waking from its hibernation; in November, credit flow to the private sector ticked up to 6.58 percent, from 6.23 percent just a month prior.

This modest progress towards economic stabilisation has come at a steep cost: slow growth, stagnant investment, rising unemployment, and declining real wages. The economy has been suffering from a slowdown for the fourth year running. If the export downturn persists, it will undo the gains of the last few months.

The business community is currently in a state of suspended animation, waiting for the national election scheduled for next month. The hope is that the polls will usher in a democratic transition, restoring policy predictability and unleashing what some are calling an investment frenzy. There is also the seasonal promise of the coming months: Ramadan and Eid-ul-Fitr are expected to stoke consumer demand.

A political transition is viewed not merely as a democratic formality but as an economic necessity.

"A credible political transition is indispensable. The incoming government will inherit formidable challenges in dismantling long-standing bottlenecks that constrain export growth, while simultaneously safeguarding external competitiveness at a time of weakening demand and rising

costs," said Razzaque, noting the amplification of pressure for the country's graduation from the least developed country category and looming loss of preferential trade treatments that have long shielded the economy.

Ashikur Rahman, the principal economist at the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh, suggests that the era of predictable stability is over. "Internal political uncertainty, institutional stress, and governance challenges will continue shaping macroeconomic management," he said. In his view, the economic policymaking of 2026 cannot rely on old assumptions. Instead, he offered a metaphor that captures the anxious alertness of the moment. "In many ways, we must behave like a deer in a forest," Rahman said. The nation must be "always alert, always conscious of the environment, attuned to early warning signals and crisis-time economic playbooks."

In this new world, where the stable ground of today can become the chaotic sinkhole of tomorrow, survival will depend on "vigilance, adaptability, discipline, and readiness to act decisively".

Talks on extra duty

FROM PAGE B1

He claimed yarn imports declined during July-December last year compared with the same period a year earlier.

According to him, the fall in yarn sales was due mainly to a slowdown in garment exports over the past few months. "When overall garment exports fall, yarn consumption also falls," he said.

Some businessmen present at the meeting said the government may consider imposing a 10 percent safeguard duty as a compromise.

The BTMA had earlier urged the government to impose a 20 percent safeguard duty on imports of 20 to 30 count yarn to protect the country's \$23 billion primary textile sector.

Dhaka eateries hit

FROM PAGE B1

The association estimates that around two crore people are directly or indirectly linked to the industry.

"Restaurant owners are facing a severe crisis as LPG prices have increased by nearly 50 percent to 60 percent," said Imran Hassan, secretary general of BROA.

The sharp rise in fuel costs has placed an unbearable burden on small and medium-sized businesses, he said. "Restaurants are receiving 30 percent to 40 percent less gas than their actual demand, causing eateries to incur around 15 percent to 20 percent losses per day."

"We cannot change food prices multiple times a day to match fluctuating fuel costs. As a result, we have become systematically hostage to the current energy crisis," Hassan said, warning that many restaurants may soon reduce production or shut down entirely.

"ARTIFICIAL SHORTAGE"

In 2025, Bangladesh imported 14.65 lakh tonnes of LPG, higher than the previous year. Of that volume, 54.2 percent arrived in the last six months, according to NBR figures. The total import bill stood at around Tk 11,780 crore, down nearly 2.7 percent year-on-year.

Local spinners say the measure is necessary to protect the domestic industry from unfair competition.

In the last week of December, BTMA leaders accused India of dumping cheap yarn in Bangladesh and said local mills were sitting on unsold stock worth Tk 12,000 crore.

According to the spinners, Bangladesh imported \$2 billion worth of yarn from India in fiscal year 2025-26, with local mills consuming around 1,600 tonnes daily. From April to October 2025, imports stood at \$950 million.

They also said Bangladesh has become the largest destination for Indian yarn exports, accounting for 44 percent of the total, followed by Cambodia at 21 percent.

Bangladesh requires around 14 to 15 lakh tonnes of LPG annually, making the latest import volume broadly in line with demand.

At a recent meeting with energy ministry officials, LPG importers said overall stock levels remain satisfactory but flagged problems such as delays in opening letters of credit, rising shipment costs due to a shortage of vessels, and delays in approvals for expanding import capacity.

They warned that without government intervention, these issues could lead to a supply crunch in the future. Some importers also alleged that certain wholesalers have already created an artificial crisis, pushing prices higher.

Government officials, meanwhile, insist there is no genuine shortage. They argue current disruptions stem largely from market manipulation and collusion among wholesalers and retailers.

"We will contact the Bangladesh Bank to provide priority in opening LCs for LPG as a necessary product," Monir Hossain Chowdhury, joint secretary of the energy and mineral resources division, said after the meeting with importers.

He said shipment costs have risen after the United States last month imposed sanctions on at least 29

Khaleda Zia strengthened

FROM PAGE B1

remain, the BSEC continues to protect investors and improve the market established during her tenure. "With that, the stock market came under the control of the regulatory body," Saiful Islam said.

Under her leadership, financial institutions began getting listed thanks to favourable policies. The market crashed in 1996, mainly due to fake paper shares. After returning to power, Khaleda Zia established the Central Depository Bangladesh Limited (CDBL), he added.

"In 2003, the CDBL started commercial operations, which helped end the paper-based share market era in Bangladesh," the DBA president said.

"So, she made an enormous contribution to the stock market.

vessels used by importers. "Now they are looking for alternatives, but costs have increased due to the ship crisis," he added.

Power and Energy Adviser Fouzul Kabir Khan has also said recent abnormal price hikes were the result of deliberate manoeuvring rather than import or production failures.

He said district administrations and consumer protection authorities have been instructed to conduct enforcement drives, including mobile courts, to curb artificial scarcity.

The ministry has also proposed tax relief measures. In a letter to the NBR yesterday, it recommended restoring a VAT exemption by lowering VAT on LPG imports to below 10 percent and removing VAT on local production and trader-level sales to ease cost pressures during the winter demand surge.

Mohammed Amirul Haque, president of the LPG Operators Association of Bangladesh, said the government had taken appropriate steps amid a difficult period.

"We are trying our best to make the situation normal as soon as possible. The problems regarding booking ships in the Middle East are not in our hands," he said. "Though shipment costs are increasing, we hope the shipments will be okayed

During her tenure, a market-based exchange rate was also introduced for the first time, which boosted the economy," he added.

"The contributions of Khaleda Zia to Bangladesh's economy and various other sectors were unique and outstanding," said DSE Chairman Mominul Islam.

He added that the foundation of Bangladesh's market-oriented, private sector driven economic framework was laid during her tenure.

"The extensive expansion of the private sector that began in 1991 is now benefiting the country's people. At the same time, her role in establishing discipline and building institutional structures in the capital market and financial sector was highly significant," the DSE chairman said.

FTA with Mercosur could boost garment exports: BGMEA

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

A trade agreement with Mercosur, a common trade bloc of five South American countries with more than \$3 trillion in gross domestic product, could create huge garment export potential for Bangladesh, experts said yesterday.

The comment came during a meeting between leaders of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) and Uruguayan Ambassador to Bangladesh Alberto Guani at the association office in Dhaka.

Currently, local garment exporters face high duties when sending apparel items to the promising Mercosur countries—Brazil, Bolivia, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay. BGMEA leaders said a trade agreement with the bloc would benefit both sides through expanded trade.

In particular, by using Uruguay's efficient ports and advanced transportation infrastructure, Bangladeshi garment exporters would be able to supply products easily across the entire Mercosur region, according to a statement issued by the BGMEA.

At yesterday's meeting, both sides discussed the need for Bangladesh to pursue a free trade agreement (FTA) with the Mercosur bloc to address challenges the South Asian country will face after graduating from the least developed country category.

Currently, local garment exporters face high duties when sending apparel items to the promising Mercosur countries

Bangladesh would receive special preferences for garment exports to Uruguay if it imports wool from the Latin nation under the proposed FTA, which would be beneficial for both countries, said BGMEA Director Sumaiya Islam.

Honorary Consul of Uruguay in Bangladesh Mostafa Quamrus Sobhan said Uruguayan Merino wool carries internationally recognised traceability certification, which Bangladeshi garment manufacturers could use to become more competitive in the global market.

BGMEA Senior Vice President Inamul Haq Khan highlighted various aspects of Bangladesh's garment industry and sought state-level cooperation to increase garment exports from Bangladesh to Uruguay. He noted that although Bangladesh is the world's second-largest garment exporter, it has not yet significantly penetrated the Latin American market, and the country is keen to capitalise on this opportunity.

BGMEA Director Shah Rayeed Chowdhury said Uruguay, in particular, could act as the main "gateway" for Bangladesh's readymade garment exports to the wider Mercosur region.

The ambassador of Uruguay expressed interest in increasing garment imports from Bangladesh and also proposed exporting world-class, fully traceable wool from his country to Dhaka.

BGMEA Director Sheikh Hossain Muhammad Mustafiz said importing wool from Uruguay would allow Bangladesh to diversify its product range and strengthen its position in the Latin American market.