

Eastern Bank donates Tk 15 lakh for students' mental wellness programme

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Eastern Bank PLC (EBL) has partnered with Moner Bondhu, a Dhaka-based mental health service provider, to support a mental health and life skills development programme for students in remote and underserved rural communities across Bangladesh.

Under the partnership, the bank has provided a financial assistance of Tk 15 lakh to implement the programme for 5,000 students from 10 schools.

Ahmed Shaheen, additional managing director of Eastern Bank PLC, handed over a cheque for the programme to Tawhida Shiropa, founder and CEO of Moner Bondhu, at the bank's head office in the capital recently, according to a press release.

Speaking at the event, Shaheen said, "Through this initiative, we are committed to providing students with the psychosocial support and skills training they need to thrive. This programme is about building resilience and creating opportunities for brighter futures."

Shiropa said the initiative aims to help young people develop emotional resilience, regain confidence and remain engaged in learning through accessible counselling and psychosocial support, while preparing



PHOTO: EASTERN BANK

Tawhida Shiropa, founder and CEO of Moner Bondhu, receives a cheque of financial aid worth Tk 15 lakh from Ahmed Shaheen, additional managing director of Eastern Bank PLC, at the bank's head office in Dhaka recently.

for a healthier and more secure future.

The initiative seeks to address the growing mental health and social challenges faced by adolescents, including emotional distress, school dropout, early marriage, abuse and limited access to future opportunities.

Md Asif Iqbal, head of the finance and human resources

department at Moner Bondhu; Sapphire Hossain Khan, project portfolio manager; Nawshaba Hridita, assistant manager for content and marketing; Ziaul Karim, head of communications and external affairs at EBL; Md Abdullah Al Mamun, company secretary; and Md Maskur, head of business information systems, were also present.

Ezazul Islam appointed DG of BIBM

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Md Ezazul Islam, executive director of Bangladesh Bank, has been appointed as the director general of the Bangladesh Institute of Bank Management (BIBM).



Md Ezazul Islam

Before joining BIBM, Islam was serving as executive director (grade-1) in charge of the Monetary Policy Department at the Bangladesh Bank.

He was also an active member of the central bank's monetary policy committee, foreign exchange auction committee and money market operation committee.

During his tenure at the central bank, he played a key role in modernising the country's monetary policy framework, including the adoption of the interest rate corridor system.

He also contributed to streamlining liquidity management and improving money market operations and instruments.

Islam spent more than 33 years at Bangladesh Bank, gaining extensive experience in monetary and fiscal policy, exchange rate management and interest rate policy.

He holds a PhD in monetary economics.

TSMC Q4 profit poised to soar 27%

REUTERS, Taipei

TSMC, the world's largest manufacturer of advanced artificial intelligence chips, is expected to post a 27 percent jump in fourth-quarter net profit to a record due to the seemingly insatiable demand for AI infrastructure.

Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co, the world's top contract chipmaker and a key supplier to Nvidia and Apple, is forecast to report a net profit of \$475.2 billion (\$15.02 billion) for the three months through December 31, according to an ISEG SmartEstimate compiled from 19 analysts.

SmartEstimates place greater weight on forecasts from analysts who are more consistently accurate.

TSMC, Asia's most valuable listed company with a market capitalisation of around \$1.38 trillion - more than twice that of South Korean rival Samsung Electronics - is due to report on Thursday and will provide first-quarter and full-year guidance in an earnings call scheduled for 0600 GMT.

It last week posted a market forecast-beating rise in fourth-quarter revenue of 20.45 percent. Any profit result above \$452.3 billion would mark the company's highest-ever quarterly net income and its eighth consecutive quarter of profit growth.

Fourth-quarter revenue was driven by full utilisation of TSMC's 3-nanometre capacity, fuelled by the iPhone 17 series using Apple's A19 chip, as well as sustained robust demand for AI, said Galen Zeng, senior research manager at research firm IDC.

Looking ahead, Zeng said IDC expects TSMC's revenue to grow 25 percent-30 percent in 2026 in US dollar terms, up from its previous forecast of 22 percent-26 percent, citing booming demand for AI server accelerators and significant contributions from the company's next-generation 2 nanometre node.

Prime Bank promotes inclusive banking thru Braille financial literacy books



PHOTO: PRIME BANK

Shaila Abedin, senior executive vice-president and head of liability at Prime Bank PLC, poses for a group photograph with participants of the initiative organised by the bank in collaboration with Team Inclusion Bangladesh in Savar recently.

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Prime Bank PLC has taken a step towards inclusive banking by distributing Braille books among persons with visual impairments, ensuring that financial knowledge is accessible to all.

The initiative was carried out recently in Savar in collaboration with Team Inclusion Bangladesh, a non-governmental organisation, and reflects the bank's strong commitment to empowering underserved communities, according to a press release.

Shaila Abedin, senior executive vice-president and head of liability at Prime Bank PLC, attended the programme as the chief guest, while Md Jahurul Islam,

founder and executive director of Team Inclusion Bangladesh, presided over the event.

Building on its earlier Consumer Banking Braille Books initiative, Prime Bank expanded its efforts through the distribution of CMSME Banking Braille books, enabling visually impaired individuals to better understand banking products, services and opportunities.

MM Mahbub Hasan, head of financial inclusion and school banking at the bank; Kazi Reshad Mahboob, head of consumer protection and service quality; Tanjila Kanij of Monash University and Swinburne University of Technology, Australia; along with other officials from the bank and the NGO, were also present.

Community Bank celebrates milestones in year-end performance

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Community Bank Bangladesh PLC has celebrated a strong year-end performance in 2025, achieving significant milestones across key financial indicators.

The bank's total income entered the four-digit mark, while its non-performing loan (NPL) ratio was reduced to one of the lowest in the industry.

The year also saw the bank's highest-ever growth in investments, deposits and overall balance sheet size, reflecting strong fundamentals, disciplined risk management and growing customer confidence.

The bank recently organised its "Annual Townhall Meeting 2026" at its head office in Dhaka, where Kimiwa Saddat, managing

director (current charge) of Community Bank Bangladesh PLC, inaugurated the celebration as the chief guest.

Speaking at the meeting, Saddat expressed his sincere appreciation to the entire team, including the board of directors, for their collective contribution to this historic performance, according to a press release.

He reaffirmed the bank's commitment to further strengthening financial performance, governance and service excellence in the coming days.

Community Bank Bangladesh PLC remains focused on sustainable growth, innovation and maintaining international banking standards while delivering long-term value to its stakeholders, according to a press release.



PHOTO: COMMUNITY BANK BANGLADESH

Kimiwa Saddat, managing director (current charge) of Community Bank Bangladesh PLC, inaugurates the celebration marking the bank's strong year-end performance for 2025 at the "Annual Townhall Meeting 2026" at its head office in Dhaka recently.

China is closing in on US technology lead despite constraints: AI researchers

REUTERS, Beijing

China can narrow its technological gap with the US driven by growing risk-taking and innovation, though the lack of advanced chipmaking tools is hobbling the sector, the country's leading artificial intelligence researchers said on Saturday.

China's so-called 'AI tiger' startups MiniMax and Zhipu AI had strong debuts on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange this week, reflecting growing confidence in the sector as Beijing fast-tracks AI and chip listings to bolster domestic alternatives to advanced US technology.

Yao Shunyu, a former senior researcher at ChatGPT maker OpenAI who was named technology giant Tencent's chief AI scientist in December, said there was a high likelihood of a Chinese firm becoming the world's leading AI company in the next three to five years but said the lack of advanced chipmaking machines was the main technical hurdle.

"Currently, we have a significant advantage in electricity and infrastructure. The main bottlenecks are production capacity, including lithography machines, and the software ecosystem," Yao said at an AI conference in Beijing.

China has completed a working prototype of an extreme-ultraviolet lithography machine potentially capable of producing cutting-edge semiconductor chips that rival the West's, Reuters reported last month. However, the machine has not yet produced working chips and may not do so until 2030, people with knowledge of the matter told Reuters.

MIND THE INVESTMENT GAP

Yao and other Chinese industry leaders at the Beijing conference on Saturday also acknowledged that the US maintains an advantage in computing power due to its hefty investments in infrastructure.

"The US computer infrastructure is likely one

to two orders of magnitude larger than ours. But I see that whether it's OpenAI or other platforms, they're investing heavily in next-generation research," said Lin Junyang, technical lead for Alibaba's flagship Qwen large language model.

"We, on the other hand, are relatively strapped for cash; delivery alone likely consumes the majority of our computer infrastructure," Lin said during a panel discussion at the AGI-Next Frontier Summit held by the Beijing Key Laboratory of Foundational Models at Tsinghua University.

Lin said China's limited resources have spurred its researchers to be innovative, particularly

through algorithm-hardware co-design, which enables AI firms to run large models on smaller, inexpensive hardware.

Tang Jie, founder of Zhipu AI which raised HK\$4.35 billion in its IPO, also highlighted the willingness of younger Chinese AI entrepreneurs to embrace high-risk ventures - a trait traditionally associated with Silicon Valley - as a positive development.

"I think if we can improve this environment, allowing more time for these risk-taking, intelligent individuals to engage in innovative endeavours ... this is something our government and the country can help improve," said Tang.



PHOTO: REUTERS/FILE

People visit a Metax booth during the World Artificial Intelligence Conference in Shanghai. China is fast-tracking AI and chip listings to bolster domestic alternatives to advanced US technology.

India eyes new markets

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export growth, it secured \$20 billion in foreign investment, increased visa access and showed Washington that New Delhi is willing to compromise.

"The New Zealand FTA makes concessions on agricultural produce like apples, even though farmers here may have concerns," said an Indian commerce ministry official, who declined to be identified.

"Who says we can't be flexible?" India's goods exports rose a surprising 19 percent in November 2025, reversing an October decline.

While the surge was helped by electronics shipments - still exempt from US tariffs - marine product exports also posted gains. "Diversification has certainly happened," KN Raghavan, of the Seafood Exporter Association of India said.

"We have increased exports to the

EU and China," he said, adding they were the top markets after the United States.

But exporters caution that alternative markets cannot fully replace the United States, with Raghavan saying a US deal is "paramount".

That remains in limbo. India's imports of Russian oil fell sharply in December to 1.2 million barrels per day from 1.8 million per day in November, according to Kpler trade data.

It is unclear if that will be enough for Trump.

Pankaj Chadha, chairman of the Engineering Export Promotion Council, said diversification had become a necessity to lessen dependence on the "biggest and the most lucrative" market.

"It's better not to put all your eggs in one basket," he said.

Japan plans to dig deep-sea

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The Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology (JAMSTEC) has touted the test as the world's first at such depths.

The area around Minami Torishima, which is in Japan's economic waters, is estimated to contain more than 16 million tons of rare earths, which the Nikkei business daily says is the third-largest reserve globally.

These rich deposits contain an estimated 730 years' worth of dysprosium, used in high-strength magnets in phones and electric cars, and 780 years' worth of yttrium, used in lasers, Nikkei said.

"If Japan could successfully extract rare earths around Minami Torishima constantly, it will secure domestic supply chain for key industries,"

Takahiro Kamisuna, research associate at The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), told AFP.

"Likewise, it will be a key strategic asset for Takaichi's government to significantly reduce the supply chain dependence on China."

The cruise is scheduled to last until February 14.

Recent media reports said Beijing was delaying Japanese imports as well as rare-earth exports to Tokyo, as their two-month-old spat escalates.

China this month blocked exports to Japan of "dual-use" items with potential military uses, fuelling worries in Japan that Beijing could choke supplies of rare earths, some of which are included in China's list of dual-use goods.