



BUSINESS

Govt raises safety net allowances for FY27

Experts question timing

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The government has increased monthly allowances and expanded beneficiary coverage for 15 social safety net programmes (SSNPs) for the upcoming fiscal year 2026-27 (FY27), which begins in July.

The Finance Division announced the decisions in a press statement yesterday following the 32nd meeting of the Advisory Council Committee on SSNPs, chaired by the finance adviser.

However, the move has drawn criticism from policy experts, who questioned the timing as the interim government has less than a month remaining in office. They also noted that implementation will fall to the next elected government, which is likely to follow its own manifesto commitments.

WHO GETS HOW MUCH

Under the Ministry of Social Welfare's old age allowance programme, the number of beneficiaries has been increased by 1 lakh to 62 lakh. Of them, 59.95 lakh elderly citizens will receive Tk 700 per month, up from Tk 650, while 2.05 lakh people aged over 90 will receive Tk 1,000.

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NBR to fully automate VAT, income tax refunds

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The National Board of Revenue (NBR) is moving to fully automate value-added tax (VAT) and income tax refunds to make the process faster, more transparent, and less burdensome for taxpayers, NBR Chairman Md Abdur Rahman Khan said yesterday.

"Automated VAT refunds have already been introduced, and income tax refunds will follow the same path," Khan said at a press briefing at NBR headquarters in Agargaon, held for International Customs Day.

He acknowledged that minor glitches might occur initially, saying such issues are inevitable when launching a new system. Similar problems were faced and resolved when e-return filing was introduced.

Refund disbursement has already started, which Khan called a "major development." He added that automation will gradually extend to income tax refunds as well.

The main goal is to reduce direct interaction between taxpayers and officials. "The greater the distance, the greater the transparency," Khan said.

According to him, the system would significantly reduce complaints, allow real-time tracking and ensure refunds are issued within a much shorter timeframe. If necessary, the law will be amended in the future to further strengthen the system.

Khan also said the government is working to rationalise overall tariff structure ahead of the country's graduation from least developed country (LDC) status.

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Higher imports raise hopes of stable food prices in Ramadan

SUKANTA HALDER and MOHAMMAD SUMAN

Traders imported more food items during the July-December period last year than in the same period a year earlier, raising expectations of a stable market during Ramadan, which begins in the third week of February.

During the fasting month, demand for several food items, such as lentils, edible oil, chickpeas, onions, ginger, dates and sugar, usually rises.

Imports of these items totalled 26.64 lakh tonnes in the first six months of the current fiscal year (FY) 2025-26, according to the National Board of Revenue (NBR). This was up by 1.04 lakh tonnes, or 4.1 percent, from 25.6 lakh tonnes in the same period last fiscal year.

The figures include goods cleared through sea and land ports, while additional consignments remain in the import pipeline ahead of Ramadan.

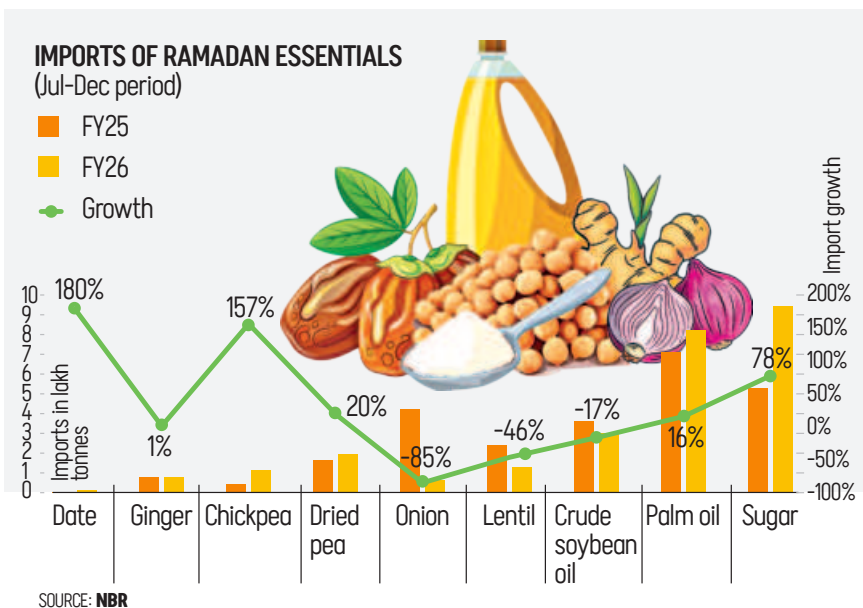
SM Muzibur Rahman, head of accounts at Meghna Group of Industries, one of the largest commodity importers and processors, said the company has sufficient stocks of soybean oil and wheat, with steady supplies continuing to arrive.

Rahman said Meghna has not faced any import shortages, ensuring adequate supply to the market.

He added that the company expects no shortages during Ramadan.

Meanwhile, wholesale and retail traders say prices of most essential commodities have remained stable so far. If supply conditions hold, prices of certain items may ease further.

Over the past week, prices of soybean



oil, palm oil, onions and turmeric have fallen, while several other commodities have remained steady, according to an analysis of state-run Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) data.

Mohammad Bablu, a retailer at Karwan Bazar, one of the largest kitchen markets in Dhaka, said prices of most Ramadan essentials have declined compared with three months ago, while overall supply remains strong.

He said chickpeas that sold for Tk 110 three months ago are now at Tk 80 to Tk 90. Sugar prices have also eased, falling from Tk 105 to Tk 95.

Lentil prices have dropped to Tk 80 to Tk 85, down from Tk 100 to Tk 110 three months ago, he said.

Bablu added that edible oil remains

the only concern due to highly volatile prices. However, there are no supply shortages.

Abul Hashem, a trader at Moulvibazar, a wholesale hub for sugar and edible oil in the capital, said the market is stable ahead of Ramadan, with no major supply disruptions so far.

He said stability in the coming weeks will depend on refiners and companies maintaining sufficient stock to meet higher Ramadan demand.

Mohammad Sohail, a fruit importer in Dhaka, said imports of dates are progressing smoothly, supported by lower import duties and better dollar availability compared to the previous year.

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No excuse for Ramadan price hikes

Bashir says

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Prices of essential commodities are expected to remain stable this Ramadan, and could even be lower than last year, thanks to higher supply and stability in domestic markets, Commerce Adviser Sk Bashir Uddin said yesterday.

Imports of essential commodities this year were on average 40 percent higher than last year, the adviser said at a press conference, citing Bangladesh Bank data on imports of widely consumed goods such as rice, wheat, edible oil, sugar, lentils, onion, garlic, grams, and dates.

He also mentioned government efforts to diversify the supply of edible oil, including the provision of 500,000 tonnes of rice bran oil sourced domestically, which is expected to positively affect local prices.

Other factors supporting price stability include improved gas supply for manufacturing units, a stable exchange rate, and healthy availability of US dollars in banking channels, he added. "Traders will have no excuse to increase commodity prices."

The adviser said on top of these, the commerce ministry will continue to monitor the market

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Draft AI policy targets innovation, better public services

MAHMUDUL HASAN

Bangladesh has drafted a national artificial intelligence (AI) policy to guide the use of AI across all sectors, aiming to become a producer of homegrown innovation, modernise public services, and promote inclusive economic growth.

The draft National AI Policy Bangladesh 2026-2030 provides a formal framework for these goals, aligning the country's technological ambitions with Vision 2041 and the United Nations' sustainable development goals (SDGs).

The policy follows an earlier 2024 draft that was not finalised. After the fall of the Awami League-led government and the socio-political changes following the July 2024 uprising, the new draft emphasises digital sovereignty, aiming to safeguard critical data,



A strong regulatory framework without sufficient technical capacity could unintentionally slow innovation

Md Ashraf Goni
A faculty member at
Stony Brook
University

infrastructure, and citizens' rights.

DEVELOPING NATIONAL BANGLA LLM

A cornerstone of the draft policy is the development of a Bangla-based advanced



contextually relevant and inclusive, while safeguarding intellectual property from foreign exploitation.

To support such large-scale innovation, the government intends to adopt a "National AI Compute Strategy", under which centralised graphics processing units (GPUs) will be procured and hosted at the National Data Center for use by various agencies and researchers.

Funding will come from an "AI Innovation Fund", projected to provide Tk 200 to Tk 250 crore through 2030 for research, development, and commercialisation. Startups and academic institutions will also benefit from targeted tax and customs incentives for importing essential hardware such as servers and accelerators.

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3-day election holiday could hurt exports

Garment, EPZ investors seek govt review

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Garment manufacturers and investors in export processing zones (EPZs) have warned that a three-day general holiday around the upcoming national election could disrupt production and hurt exports.

The government has already declared February 10 to 12 as general holidays in industrial areas in connection with the national parliamentary election and referendum scheduled for February 12.

In response, the Bangladesh EPZ Investors Association has written to the Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (Bepza), urging it to reconsider the plan. Bepza has said it is reviewing the matter in consultation with relevant stakeholders.

Khorshed Alam, executive director

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নতুন সেবা এলো (সেই আগের আপডেট আজই আপডেট করুন)

16230

FASTEST GROWING Banking App in Bangladesh

২০২৬ এর শুরুতেই আরও ২৬টি নতুন সেবা নিয়ে এলো ইবিএল স্কাইব্যাংকিং

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রেইনবো নেটওয়ার্ক	স্যাম অবলাইন	টেকলাইন নেটওয়ার্ক	উদায়	বঙ্গ	দীপ্ত রে	মূলনা ওয়াশা
রাজশাহী ওয়াশা	কারেলি কনজার্নল সার্ভিসেস	ব্যালেন সার্ভিসেস (এফসিওয়াই)	এফডি টায়ার সার্ভিসেস	ডিপিএস টায়ার সার্ভিসেস		

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