

# star BUSINESS



## 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 Bangladesh’s overall tariff structure ahead of the country’s graduation from least developed country status.

“A report on tariff transformation has been submitted to the chief adviser, including recommendations for reducing

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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.

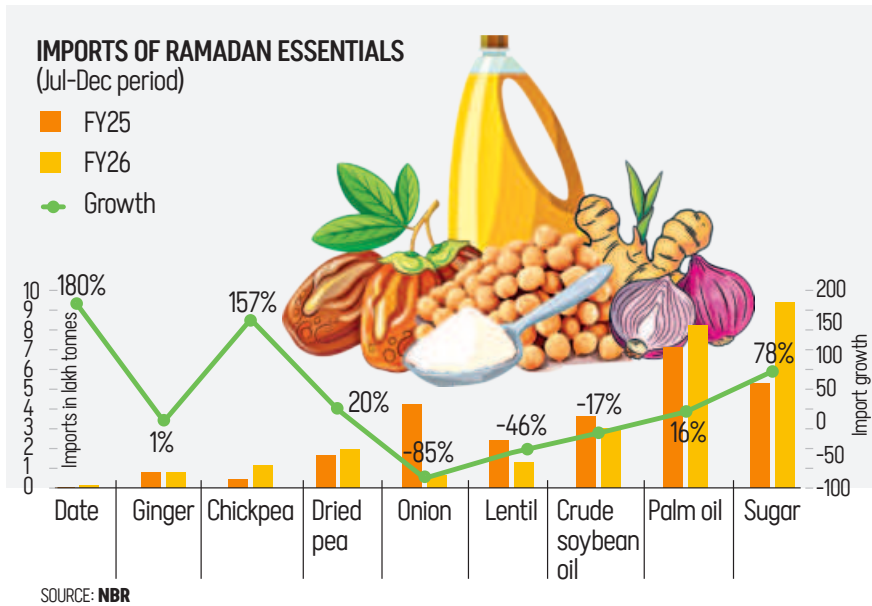
SM Muzibur Rahman, head of accounts at Meghna Group of Industries, one of the largest commodity importers and processors, said the company has sufficient stocks of oil, soybean oil and wheat, with steady supplies continuing to arrive.

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



SOURCE: NBR

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 both three months ago and the same period last year, 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 during the same period 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

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## GDP growth may hit 5% in 2026

### Govt report says

### STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh’s economic outlook for 2026 points to a potential growth of around 5 percent, with expectations of easing inflation, as per a recent government report. However, structural challenges remain, which will require strong governance and policy consistency.

The report by the General Economics Division (GED) of the Bangladesh Planning Commission – titled Economic Update & Outlook January 2026 – notes that macroeconomic stability is expected to improve.

Despite that, sustaining growth will require investment in skills and technology to diversify the economy beyond garments. This step is particularly significant as the country approaches graduation from the least developed country (LDC) category and navigates an ongoing democratic transition.

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## Draft AI policy targets innovation, better public services

### MAHMUDUL HASAN

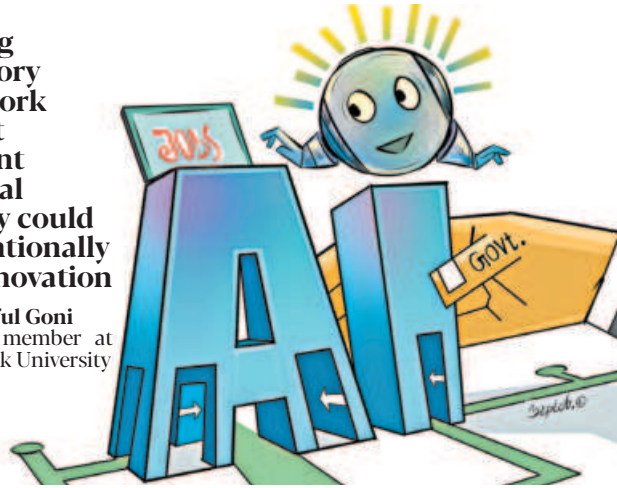
Bangladesh has drafted a national artificial intelligence (AI) policy to guide the use of AI across all sectors, aiming to become a producer of homegrown innovation, modernise public services, and promote inclusive economic growth.

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 Ashraful 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

national AI system - large language model (LLM) - like OpenAI’s ChatGPT or Google’s Gemini to digitise and preserve Bangladesh’s cultural and linguistic heritage. The model aims to make AI technologies

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

জাস-সুদাহ ফাউন্ডেশন, কোয়ালিটি ফাউন্ডেশন, বেসকো গ্রিনেইড, বেসকো পোস্টমেইড, ওয়েস্ট জোন পোস্টমেইড, বাস্তরবাদ গ্যাস, জালালাবাদ গ্যাস, কর্ণফুলী গ্যাস, পশ্চিমাঞ্চল গ্যাস, ডট ইন্টারনেট, এফ আর কমিউনিকেশন, ইনফোলিংক লিমিটেড, কাজী নেটওয়ার্কস, কে এস নেটওয়ার্কস, রেইনবো নেটওয়ার্ক, স্যাম অনলাইন, টেকলাইন নেটওয়ার্ক, উপায়, বঙ্গ, দীপ্ত রে, মূল্যে ওয়াশা, রাজশাহী ওয়াশা, কারেন্সি কনভার্সন সার্টিফিকেট, ব্যালেন্স সার্টিফিকেট (এফসিওয়াই), এফডি ট্যাক্স সার্টিফিকেট, ডিপিএস ট্যাক্স সার্টিফিকেট

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