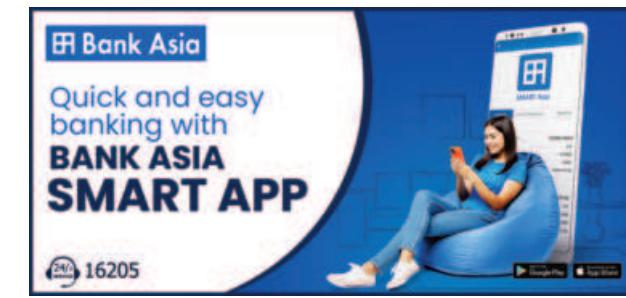


star BUSINESS



Six NBFIs finally set for liquidation, three get time to recover

BB to seek Tk 3,000cr from finance ministry for depositors

MD MEHEDI HASAN

Six non-bank financial institutions (NBFIs) out of 35 are set to be liquidated finally due to poor financial health, after the Bangladesh Bank (BB) board approved the move yesterday.

The six NBFIs are FAS Finance, Premier Leasing, Fareast Finance, Aviva Finance, People's Leasing, and International Leasing.

Initially, the regulator had planned to liquidate nine NBFIs. However, after two days of hearings, three companies - Prime Finance, GSP Finance, and Bangladesh Industrial Finance Company (BIFC) - were given three to six months to improve their finances.

Aref Hossain Khan, executive director and spokesperson of Bangladesh Bank, confirmed the development to The Daily Star.

The decision was made at a BB board meeting chaired by Governor Ahsan H Mansur.

A senior central bank official, speaking on condition of anonymity, told The Daily Star that the central bank has already declared six NBFIs non-viable, while the remaining three have been given three to six months to improve their financial condition.

Last November, the BB board approved the liquidation of troubled NBFIs under the Bank Resolution Ordinance 2025

"If the three institutions fail to recover or show meaningful progress, they will be added to the liquidation list," the official added.

Last week, BB held hearings with the nine NBFIs - FAS Finance, Bangladesh Industrial Finance Company, Premier Leasing, Fareast Finance, GSP Finance, Prime Finance, Aviva Finance, People's Leasing, and International Leasing - to determine if they had grounds to oppose liquidation.

Last November, the BB board approved the liquidation of troubled NBFIs under the Bank Resolution Ordinance 2025, the country's first comprehensive framework for resolving failing banks and NBFIs.

The ordinance outlines procedures for merging, restructuring, or closing distressed institutions and sets the hierarchy for repaying creditors once assets are sold.

Together, the nine NBFIs account for 52 percent - Tk 25,089 crore - of the sector's total defaulted loans as of the end of 2024, reflecting years of unchecked lending irregularities and capital erosion.

BB Governor Ahsan H Mansur recently said that individual depositors of the nine troubled NBFIs may recover their principal amounts before Ramadan in February.

A senior BB official added that the central bank will

READ MORE ON B3

US may cut tariffs on Bangladesh next week

Lutfe Siddiqi says

UNB

The United States may announce a reduction in the reciprocal tariffs imposed on Bangladesh by the end of this week or early next week, Lutfe Siddiqi, special envoy on international affairs to the chief adviser, said yesterday.

Speaking at a press conference at the Foreign Service Academy, where he briefed the media on Bangladesh's engagements and outcomes at the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Siddiqi said Washington is sincere about lowering tariffs on Bangladesh, and an announcement is expected soon.

He, however, said it is still unclear to what extent the current 20 percent tariff will be reduced.

The special envoy said he discussed the issue with US Treasury Secretary and member of President Donald Trump's cabinet, Scott Bessent, on the sidelines of the Davos conference.

"Many elements of the US non-tariff policies align with the reform agenda of Bangladesh's interim government. Besides, the trade deficit of around \$6 billion with the US has come down significantly. Considering these factors, the United States is showing sincerity in reducing trade barriers on Bangladesh. A better decision will come soon," he said.

On Bangladesh-EU trade relations, Siddiqi said discussions were held with EU Commissioners Roxana Minzatu and Jozef Sikela on a possible free trade agreement (FTA). "We have clearly conveyed that Bangladesh wants an FTA with the EU, and they have shown interest. But their process is slow."

He said the EU is currently pursuing

READ MORE ON B3

LDC graduation will expose economy to serious risks

Business leaders and bankers say Bangladesh is not yet ready for post-LDC challenges



Bangladesh Bank Governor Ahsan H Mansur is seen with business leaders, bankers, senior executives and members of the board of directors of the ICCB at a roundtable on LDC graduation challenges for banking industry at Sheraton Dhaka in Banani yesterday. PHOTO: ICCB

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh is not fully prepared to face the economic and institutional challenges that will follow its graduation from the least developed country (LDC) category later this year, business leaders and bankers said yesterday, warning that it could expose the economy to serious risks.

Speaking at a roundtable on the implications of LDC graduation for the banking sector, they cautioned that Bangladesh will gradually lose preferential market access, concessional financing and policy flexibilities, while facing intensified global competition, pressure on exports and rising living costs.

These changes will place new pressures on the economy, particularly on the financial system, ICCB President Mahbubur Rahman said at the event organised by International Chamber of Commerce Bangladesh (ICCB).

Noting that the graduation should be seen as a structural shift rather than a symbolic milestone, he added, "In the post-LDC era, a strong, credible, and autonomous central bank will be the anchor of financial stability and confidence."

AK Azad, vice president of ICCB, said there were real post-graduation impacts on exports and other sectors. "We clearly presented these to the interim government, but they did not agree."

He urged the next government to take up

the issue with urgency, as understanding and addressing the realities of LDC graduation would take time.

Simeen Rahman, chief executive officer of Transcom Group, said graduation would reshape Bangladesh's policy space and competitiveness, particularly in sectors

Pay hikes for govt staff may fuel inflation: governor

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The interim government's proposed new pay scale for public servants could intensify inflationary pressures and strain the banking system, Bangladesh Bank (BB) Governor Ahsan H Mansur said yesterday.

"The salary hike will require borrowing more from the banking system. Is that going to help reduce inflation? No," the governor said at an event on the implications of the LDC graduation for the banking system, organised by the International Chamber of Commerce-Bangladesh (ICCB) in Dhaka.

READ MORE ON B3

directly affecting people's lives.

Emphasising the pharmaceutical industry, she said coordinated policy, regulatory efficiency, financial support and adequate transition time were crucial to preserving domestic strength and export potential. Local production of active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs), she added, was a key preparatory step.

"If we place people's health, industrial strength and financial stability at the centre of this transition, Bangladesh will graduate not only with pride but with confidence," she said.

Former BKMEA president Fazlul Hoque said while graduation was welcome, the private sector remained deeply uneasy about preparedness. "The reality is that we are not well prepared. That is why we have been advocating for an extension," he said.

However, he warned that even a two- or three-year extension would be meaningless without concrete action.

"We already had eight years to prepare... There were many meetings and seminars, but little real progress. If we waste the next few months, even with an extension, we will simply repeat the same discussions," he said.

Muhammad A (Rumei) Ali, chairman of the ICCB Banking Commission, said despite extensive discussion of graduation's sectoral impacts, the banking industry had lacked urgency and proactive policy dialogue.

READ MORE ON B3

Drug sales growth slip to single digits amid high costs, inflation

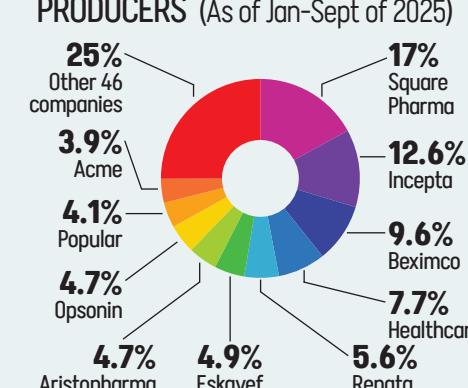
SALES GROWTH OF PHARMAS (In %) Jan-Sept period



MARKET SHARE OF COMPANIES EXCEPT TOP 10 (In %) Jan-Sept period



MARKET SHARE OF TOP DRUG PRODUCERS (As of Jan-Sept of 2025)



PATIENTS, FIRMS BOTH CUT BACK

According to IQVIA, which tracks prescription data from pharmacies, covering 93 percent of outpatient activity, sales of prescribed medicines rose 9 percent to Tk 37,500 crore in the first nine months of 2025.

In the same period a year earlier, sales grew by 15 percent, roughly in line with the average annual growth rate before the pandemic.

For patients, the slowdown has meant selective consumption rather than abandoning treatment altogether.

Medicines for chronic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension and high cholesterol continue to be prioritised. Spending on supportive or adjunct drugs has declined, however, as inflation has hovered above 8 percent for more than three years, squeezing household budgets.

Hosne Ara Begum, an elderly patient in Chittagong, said she now limits her purchases to what she considers essential. "I take my cholesterol medicine regularly, but other medicines like boosters and gastric drugs I often skip."

She said, "The cost of medicines is a burden for my son, who supports six family members. With prices rising everywhere, we had no option but to cut back."

Manufacturers say the demand slowdown has coincided with a sharp rise in operating costs. The weaker taka has driven up spending on imported active pharmaceutical ingredients and other raw materials, while higher interest rates, energy prices and wages have further narrowed margins.

"The dollar rate has gone up, interest rates have increased, energy prices are higher, wages have risen, and many other costs have grown," said Zakir Hossain, secretary general of the Bangladesh Association of Pharmaceutical Industries (Bapi) and managing director of Delta Pharma Ltd.

He said the impact was falling most heavily on "small companies, and many of them are being squeezed day by day".

Large pharmaceutical firms have generally continued producing some loss-making

READ MORE ON B2

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16201

Midland Bank signs MoU with Bridge Holdings



Md Harun-ur Rashid, chairman of Bridge Holdings Limited, and Md Zahid Hossain, managing director (current charge) of Midland Bank PLC, pose for a photograph after signing the memorandum of understanding at the realtor's head office in Gulshan-2, Dhaka recently.

PHOTO: MIDLAND BANK

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Midland Bank PLC recently signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Bridge Holdings Limited, a real estate developer in Bangladesh.

Md Zahid Hossain, managing director (current charge) of Midland Bank PLC, and Md Harun-ur Rashid, chairman of Bridge Holdings Limited, signed the MoU at the developer company's head office in Gulshan-2, Dhaka, according to a press release.

Under the partnership, customers of Bridge Holdings will be able to avail themselves of hire-purchase facilities under the Shirkatul Melk product of MDB Saalam, a sharia-based financing facility offered by Midland Bank's Islami banking services, to purchase properties from Bridge Holdings Limited.

Md Abdur Rashid, managing director of the realtor, and Hasan Mahbubur Rahman, director of sales and marketing, attended the programme.

NRBC Bank holds BIZCON2026

STAR BUSINESS DESK

NRBC Bank PLC organised its annual business conference, titled "BIZCON2026", at the Le Meridien Dhaka recently.

This year's conference theme was "Leading the Change", according to a press release.

Md Ali Hossain Prodhania, chairman of NRBC Bank PLC, inaugurated the conference as the chief guest.

In his remarks, Prodhania said the bank has set a vision to transform NRBC Bank into a sustainable, well-governed and technology-driven institution by strengthening governance, enhancing risk management and elevating customer service.

He emphasised automation, data-driven decision-making and best-in-class corporate governance as core elements of the bank's long-term strategy.



Md Ali Hossain Prodhania, chairman of NRBC Bank PLC, poses for a group photograph with participants of the bank's annual business conference, titled "BIZCON2026", at the Le Meridien Dhaka recently.

PHOTO: NRBC BANK

Electro Mart holds 'Partners Meet 2026'

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Electro Mart Limited recently organised the "Partners Meet 2026" for leading global electronics brands Konka, Gree and Haiko at a hotel in Dhaka.

More than 100 partners and associates from across the country participated in the event, according to a press release. Mohammed Nurun Newaz Salim, chairman of Electro Mart Group, inaugurated the programme as the chief guest.

He acknowledged the unwavering support of the company's partners in promoting, expanding and marketing Konka, Gree and Haiko products in Bangladesh over the past three decades.

Salim also highlighted the establishment of a production facility in Narayanganj, noting that the

company continues to expand its product lineup.

During the event, Md Nurul Amin, managing director of Electro Mart Group, said Bangladesh's electronics

industry was once entirely import-dependent. However, with industry-friendly policies, it is now evolving into a self-reliant manufacturing sector.



Mohammed Nurun Newaz Salim, chairman of Electro Mart Group, poses for a group photograph with participants of the "Partners Meet 2026" at a hotel in Dhaka recently.

PHOTO: ELECTRO MART

Dhaka Bank, Mastercard launch 'Spend & Win Winter Campaign'

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Dhaka Bank PLC has launched the "Spend & Win Winter Campaign" in partnership with Mastercard, a global digital payment solutions provider.

Cardholders of both organisations will have the opportunity to win attractive rewards, including a grand prize of a couple's tour to Kenya, according to a press release. The campaign aims to make winter spending more rewarding for Dhaka Bank and Mastercard cardholders by encouraging cashless transactions while offering exclusive lifestyle benefits.

During the campaign period, eligible cardholders will automatically enter a lucky draw by using their Dhaka Bank Mastercard for everyday purchases. In addition to the grand prize, a total of 45 other rewards are up for grabs, making the campaign one of the most rewarding seasonal promotions for cardholders.

Drug sales growth

FROM PAGE B1
medicines, often to retain market presence or meet what they see as social responsibilities.

Smaller companies, with limited cash reserves and narrower product portfolios, have found such productions harder to sustain, and have halted production of numerous drugs.

Blaming government policy for the crisis, Hossain said, "I don't know why the government is killing a successful industry."

Describing pharmaceuticals as an import-substituting sector, he warned that restricting price increases could harm local production.

If local companies stop production, many medicines will have to be imported at much higher

prices. Currently, the sector meets 98 percent of local demand and imports raw materials worth around \$1 billion annually. If medicines had to be imported instead, the country would need to spend \$7-\$11 billion.

SMALL ONES SUFFER MOST

The impact of the slowdown has been uneven across the market.

IQVIA data covering 56 companies show that the top 10 producers now account for 75 percent of prescription drug sales, up from 69 percent in 2021. The remaining 46 companies share the rest.

Sales among the largest firms, many of which also export abroad, have remained comparatively resilient, with the top 10 companies not seeing any drop in sales.

Square Pharmaceuticals, the market leader, recorded an 8.8 percent rise in sales to Tk 6,428 crore in January-September 2025, although this was well below its 15.8 percent growth rate a year earlier, holding about 17 percent of the market.

Among other top players, Arishtopharma posted 21 percent growth, followed by Popular Pharmaceuticals at 19 percent and Renata PLC at 16 percent.

Among smaller firms, however, around 80 percent reported a decline in sales over the same period, IQVIA data show.

Syed S Kaiser Kabir, chief executive officer and managing director of Renata, said smaller companies are particularly vulnerable during periods of cost pressure because they depend heavily on bank borrowing.

"Large companies usually have enough cash, so higher interest rates don't affect them much," he said. "Small companies rely on overdrafts, which hurts their bottom line."

He claimed that government restrictions on medicine price increases have worsened the situation, forcing 30-40 small firms to stop production.

Renata itself has discontinued over 100 loss-making prescription medicines, though many of those products continue to be manufactured by other firms.

However, he noted that smaller companies often lack the scale to make similar adjustments and have instead exited production altogether.

Kabir warns that if price adjustment is not allowed, many people in the sector will lose their jobs. "At present, drug prices in Bangladesh are lower than in the global market, so the government should allow price adjustments."

Rashed Hasan, managing director and chief executive officer of UCB Asset Management, which conducts research across sectors including pharmaceuticals, said prolonged inflation has reduced demand for prescribed medicines beyond essential treatments, with larger firms better positioned to absorb the impact.

"Most essential drugs are produced by top companies, so their sales are less affected. Their brand value, strong distribution networks, pricing strategies, and higher profit margins keep them ahead of smaller companies," he explained.

Regulators say they have sought to balance affordability with industry sustainability.

Pashchimanchal Gas Company Limited

(A Company of Petrobangla)

Nalka, Sirajganj.

e-Tender Notice

Energy security is the top priority

Reference No: 28.18.0000.000.039.07.0010.2025-26/

Date: 26/01/2026

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the Procurement of the following goods described below:

Tender Package Description	Tender ID	Tender/Proposal Document Publication date	Tender/Proposal Document last selling/downloading date and time	Last Date and Time for Tender/Proposal Security Submission	Tender/Proposal Closing Date and Time	Procurement Method
Procurement of Desktop Computer, Printer & Scanner	1217560	28-January-2026	08-February-2026 at 11:00 AM	08-February-2026 at 02:30 PM	08-February-2026 at 03:00 PM	OTM

- This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the e-GP portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted.
- To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required.
- The fees for downloading the e-Tender document from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposit online through any registered bank's branches.
- Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

PGP-27/2025-2026 (3x4")

General Manager (Administration)
e-mail: gm.admin@pgol.org.bd
Contact No.01730357237



Eleash Mridha, managing director of PRAN Group, speaks at the launching programme of the "PRAN Milk-Khati Khamari Award 2026" at the MCCI conference room in Gulshan, Dhaka yesterday.

PHOTO: PRAN GROUP

PRAN Milk launches 'Khati Khamari Award 2026' to honour dairy farmers

STAR BUSINESS DESK

PRAN Milk, one of the country's leading liquid milk brands, has launched the "PRAN Milk-Khati Khamari Award 2026" to recognise and honour dairy farmers for their contributions to the development of Bangladesh's dairy industry.

Spot registration for the award will begin on February 1 at 124 Village Milk Collection Centres (VMCCs) of PRAN Dairy across the country, including Pabna, Rangpur, Sirajganj, Bogura, Sylhet, Khulna, Jashore, Magura, Kurigram and Natore.

A total of 16,000 enlisted dairy farmers associated with PRAN Dairy will be eligible to register by submitting the required information through registration forms.

Eleash Mridha, managing director of PRAN Group, briefed the media about the award at the MCCI conference room in Gulshan, Dhaka yesterday, according to a press release.

They will receive honour crests along with cash and gift prizes worth several lakh taka, while the remaining seven will receive special recognitions.

Speaking about the initiative, Mridha said the primary objective of the campaign was to honour and inspire dairy farmers who have made outstanding contributions to the sector. By highlighting their inspiring stories, he added, the company also aims to encourage others to take up dairy farming and reaffirm PRAN Milk's commitment to providing safe and high-quality milk to consumers.

In the second phase, the information provided by registered farmers will be reviewed and verified, after which a special jury board comprising representatives from the relevant sector will be formed.

The jury board will initially shortlist the top 10 Khati Khamari farmers. In the final phase, based on jury scores and consumer voting, the top three will be selected.

They will receive honour crests along with cash and gift prizes worth several lakh taka, while the remaining seven will receive special recognitions.

Trust Bank unveils 'Visa Signature Plus' credit card

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Trust Bank PLC has recently launched a new premium credit card, titled "Visa Signature Plus", at a ceremony in Dhaka, marking another milestone in the bank's ongoing efforts to enhance its card portfolio and customer experience.

Chief of Army Staff General Waker-Uz-Zaman, chairman of Trust Bank PLC, inaugurated the credit card as the chief guest, according to a press release.

The Visa Signature Plus credit card offers exclusive lifestyle privileges, enhanced security features, global acceptance and premium benefits tailored for high-value customers.

The introduction of the premium credit card reinforces Trust Bank's strategic focus on innovation, digital transformation and customer-centric services, the release added.



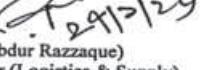
Chief of Army Staff General Waker-Uz-Zaman, chairman of Trust Bank PLC, inaugurates "Visa Signature Plus" credit card in Dhaka recently.

PHOTO: TRUST BANK

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh Office of the Project Director Accelerating and Strengthening Skills for Economic Transformation (ASSET) Project Directorate of Technical Education Plot -F-4/B, Agargaon, Sher-E-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207 www.asset-dte.gov.bd				
Memo No: 57.03.0000.051.07.966.26-396				
Date: 27 January, 2026				
Corrigendum Notice-2				
e-Tender ID & Package No.	Tender Document last selling / downloading Date and Time as per corrigendum 1;	Revised Tender Document last selling / downloading Date and Time:	Tender Opening Date and Time as per corrigendum 1:	Revised Tender Opening Date and Time:
1209467 (G73)	01-Feb-2026 17:00	08-Feb-2026 10:00	02-Feb-2026 15:00	08-Feb-2026 15:00

Reason for Corrigendum: Changes have been made in the Price Schedule for Goods (Form e-PG3A-4A). Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

GD-209

GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF FAMILY PLANNING LOGISTICS & SUPPLY UNIT (5 TH FLOOR) 6 KARWANBAZAR, DHAKA 1215, BANGLADESH.			
e-Tender Notice (OTM, NCT, Goods)			
Ref. No: 59.11.0000.303.07.032.2025-50			
Date: 27/01/2026			
e-Tender is invited in the national e-GP portal for the procurement of following goods:			
Tender ID-No. & Package No.	Tender Package name	Last Selling/ Downloading Date & Time	Closing Date & Time
1	2	3	4
ID No: 1209580 Package No: Admin/GR-06	Procurement of Miscellaneous Goods for Administration and Other Units	16 February 2026, 17:00	17 February 2026, 12:30 PM
2. This is an online tender where only e-tender (online tender) will be accepted through the national e-GP portal and no off-line/hard copy will be accepted. To submit e-tender please register on e-GP portal.			
3. The fees for downloading the e-tender documents from the national e-GP portal have to be deposited online through any schedule bank of Bangladesh registered by the CPTU.			
4. Further information & guidelines are available in the national e-GP portal & e-GP help desk (Help desk: helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).			
 Md. Abdur Razzaque Director (Logistics & Supply) Logistics & Supply Unit Directorate General of Family Planning e-mail: dirsdgfp@gmail.com			
GD-206			

Jute millers threaten shutdown from Feb 1 over raw jute shortage

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh's jute millers have warned of a countrywide shutdown from February 1 if the government fails to resolve an acute shortage of raw jute, which they say has already disrupted production and forced several mills to close.

The Bangladesh Jute Mills Association (BJMA) in a press release yesterday said its member mills are facing severe difficulties towards the end of the current 2025-26 fiscal year as they are unable to procure adequate raw jute amid a sharp and abnormal rise in prices.

BJMA and Bangladesh Jute Spinners Association (BJSAs) jointly wrote to the adviser to the Ministry of Textiles and Jute on January 26, urging government intervention to release stockpiled raw jute at reasonable prices, curb hoarding, and ensure sufficient supply to mills. Without prompt action, they said, mill shutdowns would be inevitable.

Raw jute is now selling at Tk 5,000 to Tk 5,500 per maund, depending on quality, putting it beyond the purchasing capacity of many mills.

During the peak harvesting season in July-August 2025, raw jute was trading between Tk 2,200 and Tk 2,400 per maund. The current price represents a more than 120 percent increase in just six months.

According to the association, prices began rising steadily from September to November 2025 due to a supply-demand mismatch, made worse by continued exports of raw jute, and alleged hoarding by a section of traders and exporters.

BJMA claimed that a handful of middlemen have stockpiled raw jute in warehouses, creating an artificial crisis in the domestic market. The millers said they had earlier raised the issue with the commerce ministry.



Raw jute is now selling at Tk 5,000 to Tk 5,500 per maund, depending on quality.

PHOTO: SUZIT KUMAR DAS

In September 2025, the Ministry of Commerce amended the Export Policy 2024-27 to move raw jute onto the "conditional export" list, requiring prior approval for all shipments.

However, the ministry subsequently issued circulars allowing 12 firms to export nearly 3,000 tonnes of raw jute in October alone.

BJMA and BJSAs said that these approvals, granted while local prices were already skyrocketing, depleted

the domestic stock and emboldened hoarders.

Following meetings with representatives of BJMA and BJSAs in August and September last year, the ministry issued a circular allowing the conditional export of raw jute. However, the measure failed to stabilise the market, the association said.

Several jute mills have already suspended operations due to the shortage, and the remaining ones may follow suit if the situation persists, the release adds.

US may cut tariffs

FROM PAGE B1
FTA with the EU, and they have shown interest. But their process is slow."

He said the EU is currently pursuing FTAs with India and may move towards Vietnam next, which could pose challenges for Bangladesh. "Still, there is no reason to panic. We must continue discussions. I will leave detailed notes on this for the next government."

Siddiqi also pointed out that securing GSP Plus facilities in the EU market after Bangladesh's graduation from LDC status will be challenging, and warned that excessive export concentration on a single product could risk losing GSP Plus benefits, noting that Bangladesh's garment exports heavily dominate the EU market, which could create future vulnerabilities.

Referring to talks with World Trade Organization (WTO) Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Siddiqi said future trade policy issues were discussed, where the WTO chief advised Bangladesh to gradually move beyond multilateral trade reliance and focus more on bilateral trade agreements.

In this context, the special envoy to the chief adviser said productive

discussions were held with Japan on an economic partnership agreement (EPA).

Japanese Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Akazawa Ryosei informed him that a formal agreement with Bangladesh could be signed within the next one or two weeks.

Bangladesh will also enjoy duty-free transit facilities in Japan for three years after LDC graduation, he said.

Talks on FTAs are ongoing with South Korea, while negotiations with Singapore are almost at the final stage. In the future global trade environment, surviving without FTAs or EPAs will be difficult," Siddiqi said.

He said discussions with Thai Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuangketkeow covered potential Thai investment in Bangladesh's food processing sector and the use of Thai ports to boost bilateral trade.

On the Rohingya repatriation issue, Siddiqi said the matter was discussed with UN Special Envoy on Myanmar Julie Bishop in Davos. "As days pass, global geopolitics surrounding Myanmar are becoming more complicated. Bangladesh

must remain focused on its rightful demands."

Highlighting talks with International Organization for Migration Director General Amy Pope, the special envoy said discussions focused on legal migration from Bangladesh.

"There is a perception internationally that Bangladesh is not serious about illegal migration and is content as long as people go abroad. We are trying to change that perception."

He mentioned that 600 holders of fake passports were sent back from Singapore last month. "Previously, no action was taken against them. This time, with support from the CID, each individual will be brought under the law."

Stressing the need for changing Bangladesh's diplomatic approach, Siddiqi said symbolic gestures such as signing MoUs, handshakes, and photo opportunities are no longer sufficient; Bangladesh must make itself more relevant globally.

Corridor diplomacy and issue-based negotiations must be prioritised to clearly present Bangladesh's positions to the world, he said.

lower expectations, why can't we bring inflation down?" he asked.

He said inflation expectations are visible across the labour market, where workers routinely expect annual wage increases. In many factories, wages rise by 10 percent, 15 percent, or even 20 percent each year - not necessarily because productivity has increased, but because higher inflation is assumed.

"These expectations are deeply ingrained. We have to break that cycle," he said. "Unless expectations change, inflation will not come down to 3 or 4 percent. And that will take time."

FROM PAGE B1
The government is planning a general salary increase, which will double the wage bill.

Speaking about the central bank's efforts to tame inflation, Mansur said bringing down inflation is achievable, but will take time.

Bangladesh, he noted, has already reduced inflation from around 12.5 percent to about 8.3 percent. "Inflation has to come down. But we must give it time. We must be patient."

However, he cautioned that the real challenge lies in breaking inflation expectations, which have

been long-established.

"Historically, Bangladesh has never had low inflation," he said, noting that inflation has typically hovered around 6 percent to 8 percent.

Claims of sustained high growth alongside low inflation, he added, were often more artificial than real.

"This is why interest rates cannot be low," he said, adding that rates can only fall sustainably if non-performing loans are reduced sharply through accountability, good governance, and effective supervision.

"If we can reduce bad loans and

lower expectations, why can't we bring inflation down?" he asked.

He said inflation expectations are visible across the labour market, where workers routinely expect annual wage increases. In many factories, wages rise by 10 percent, 15 percent, or even 20 percent each year - not necessarily because productivity has increased, but because higher inflation is assumed.

"These expectations are deeply ingrained. We have to break that cycle," he said. "Unless expectations change, inflation will not come down to 3 or 4 percent. And that will take time."

Sundarban Gas Company Limited

(A Company of Petrobangla)

Operation Division

218, M.A Bari Sarak, Sonadanga, Khulna

জাতীয় সম্পদ খাদ্যের অপচয় রোধ
করে জাতীয় দায়িত্ব পালন করুন

Date: 25-01-2026

Tender Invitation Reference No. 28.21.0000.181.61.002.25/MP

e-Tender Notice

e-Tender is invited through e-GP Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) by Operation Division, Sundarban Gas Company Limited for the procurement of the following work which will be available at e-GP website (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) from date 29-01-2026 & time 10:00:

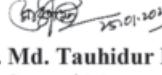
Sl. No.	Tender ID, Reference No. & Procurement Method	Package No.	Description of works	Last selling date & time	Closing date & time	Opening date & time
01	1214023, 28.21.0000.181.61.002.25/MP & Open Tendering Method (OTM)	28.21.0000.0.181.61.002.25	Construction, Transportation & Installation of Marker Post for 33KM Gas Transmission pipeline at Bhola, SGCL.	9 February 2026 17:00	10 February 2026 12:00	10 February 2026 12:00

This is an online tender, where only e-Tenders will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted.

To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required.

The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through any registered bank branches.

Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).


Engr. Md. Tahmidur Rahman
General Manager
Operation Division
SGCL, Khulna

GD-104

Chinese firm to invest \$16.34m at Bepza EZ

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Chinese company Huazhu Accessories Co Ltd signed an agreement with the Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (Bepza) to set up an accessories manufacturing factory at the Bepza Economic Zone in Mirsharai, Chattogram.

According to the agreement, signed on Monday at the Bepza Complex in Dhaka, the company will invest \$16.34 million, creating employment opportunities for 1,395 Bangladeshi nationals.

The factory will produce a wide range of items, including bra cups, bra wire, hook and eye, webbing tape, elastic, drawstrings, sliders, snap buttons, logos, hardware for bags and luggage, and ribbons, with a projected annual output of 40 lakh kilogrammes.

The agreement was signed by Md Tanvir Hossain, executive director (investment promotion) of Bepza, and Yang Yanmei, managing director of Huazhu Accessories Co Ltd.

Mohammad Moazzem Hossain, executive chairman of Bepza, welcomed the investor and reaffirmed the authority's commitment to facilitating industrial setup, providing prompt services, and ensuring a business-friendly environment.

Other Bepza officials present at the event included Abdullah Al Mamun, member (engineering); ANM Faizul Haque, member (finance); Md Khurshid Alam, executive director (enterprise services); Samir Biswas, executive director (administration); and ASM Anwar Parvez, executive director (public relations), along with representatives from Huazhu Accessories Co Ltd.

Hybrid cars top choice in Europe

AFP, Paris

Hybrid electric vehicles dethroned purely petrol-powered cars as the top power option among consumers in Europe last year, data showed Tuesday.

Some 1.88 million new vehicles were registered in 2025 in the European Union, an increase of 1.8 percent from the previous year, according to the European Automobile Manufacturers' Association (ACEA).

He mentioned that 600 holders of fake passports were sent back from Singapore last month. "Previously, no action was taken against them. This time, with support from the CID, each individual will be brought under the law."

Stressing the need for changing Bangladesh's diplomatic approach, Siddiqi said symbolic gestures such as signing MoUs, handshakes, and photo opportunities are no longer sufficient; Bangladesh must make itself more relevant globally.

He said discussions with Thai Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuangketkeow covered potential Thai investment in Bangladesh's food processing sector and the use of Thai ports to boost bilateral trade.

On the Rohingya repatriation issue, Siddiqi said the matter was discussed with UN Special Envoy on Myanmar Julie Bishop in Davos. "As days pass, global geopolitics surrounding Myanmar are becoming more complicated. Bangladesh

new car sales "remain well below pre-pandemic levels", however, the trade association said in a statement.

Despite the only modest overall sales growth, consumers continued to shift towards hybrid and battery-electric vehicles.

Sales of hybrid-electric vehicles climbed by 13.5 percent last year to account for 34.5 percent of total sales in the EU last year, putting them ahead of petrol cars at 26.6 percent.

Meanwhile, sales of battery-electric

vehicles jumped by 30 percent to account for 17.4 percent of overall sales, although the ACEA noted the gain was from a weak performance in 2024 and needs to rise further to stay on track with the EU's transition goals.

Sales of plug-in hybrids also rose, but sales of petrol and diesel vehicles dropped.

The combined market share of petrol and diesel cars fell to 35.5 percent, down from 45.2 percent in 2024.

Six NBFIs finally set for liquidation

FROM PAGE B1
write to the Ministry of Finance to request a Tk 3,000 crore bailout package, as the number of NBFIs facing liquidation has now decreased.

Earlier, the BB governor had said the Ministry of Finance had verbally approved Tk 5,000 crore for the liquidation of the nine NBFIs.

According to central bank data, the nine institutions hold Tk 15,370 crore in deposits, of which Tk 3,525 crore belongs to individual depositors and Tk 11,845 crore to banks and corporate clients.

As of September 2025, the country's 35 NBFIs had Tk 29,408.66 crore in non-performing loans, equal to 37.11 percent of their total outstanding loans of Tk 79,251.11 crore, according to BB data.

A year earlier, in September 2024, the sector's non-performing loan ratio was 35.52 percent.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Office of the Principal
Sylhet Polytechnic Institute, Sylhet-3100

Website: <https://sylhet.polytech.gov.bd>

E-mail: principalsylhetpoly@gmail.com

Accelerating & Strengthening Skills for Economic Transformation (ASSET) Project

Memo No. 57.03.9131.349.004.07.0007.25-71

Date: 27/01/2026

e-Tender Notice

e-Tender Notice will be invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for following procurement.

Tender ID No.	Package No.	Package description	Tender publication date and time	Tender closing & opening date and time
1219430	ASSET-SPI-25-26-WD-01	Refurbishment Work (with Interior) of Academic Building, Principal Room, Conference Room, Lab, Placement Cell, Classroom	27-Jan-2026 17:00:00	10-Feb-2026 17:00:00

App-based banking gains traction as customers go digital

SOHEL PARVEZ

Banking is no longer limited to brick-and-mortar branches. People are banking remotely using the internet more and more. Of late, mobile applications have come up as a new and inviting option, and a growing number of customers are using apps for banking in Bangladesh.

In November, 85.7 lakh customers used mobile apps to do banking, up nearly 13 percent from 76 lakh a month ago, thanks to the fast adoption by women customers, according to Bangladesh Bank (BB) data. In June, 71.66 lakh customers used mobile apps.

Bankers find this scenario to be part of a broader shift of people towards automation and digitalisation of various services.

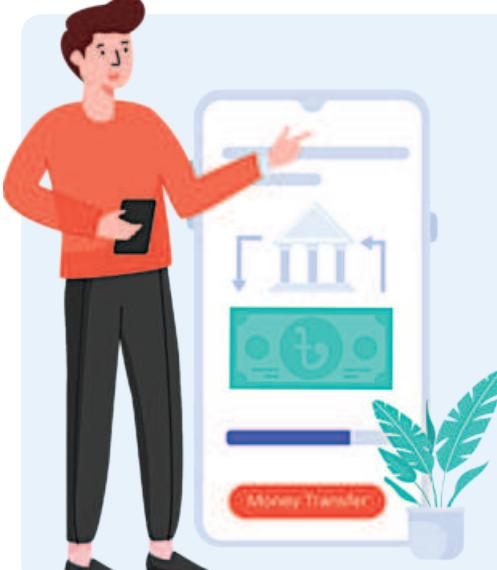
"App-based banking in Bangladesh is expanding rapidly as customers increasingly depend on digital channels for everyday financial needs. Widespread smartphone adoption, improved mobile internet access, and a strong preference for faster, convenient, and 24/7 banking services have accelerated this shift," said Ali Reza Iftekhar, managing director of Eastern Bank PLC.

Mobile apps now place most banking services directly in customers' hands, significantly reducing the need for branch visits, said Ali Reza Iftekhar, MD of Eastern Bank

In a written reply, he said mobile apps now place most banking services directly in customers' hands, significantly reducing the need for branch visits.

"With nearly all private commercial banks offering app-based banking, digital transactions have surged, benefiting both customers and banks. Busy lifestyles, growing trust in digital payments, and the widespread use of smartphones are also accelerating Bangladesh's transition towards a more cashless, digitally driven economy."

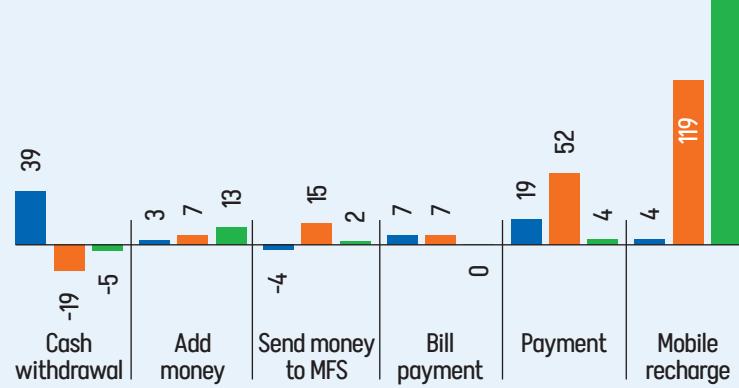
The private bank's app, EBL Skybanking, has half a million users, and it processed over half a trillion taka in transactions across digital and "phygital" channels such as ATMs and CRMs.



INTERNET BANKING TRANSACTIONS

Growth in %

■ Sept '25 ■ Oct '25 ■ Nov '25



SOURCE: BB

This growth is further supported by a 79 percent year-on-year increase in average transaction numbers, a 90 percent rise in average transaction volume, and a 59 percent growth in digital youth users.

"This clearly indicates the rapid expansion of internet banking at EBL."

The BB said the number of customers taking financial services through internet banking is on the rise, too. However, overall transactions through internet banking dropped 12 percent to Tk 1,07,993 crore from the previous month.

Despite the fall, overall transactions through digital platforms have been staying over Tk 1,00,000 crore for six months since June 2025.

The BB said 58 out of 61 banks are now providing services through the internet.

Sending money to mobile financial services is the biggest form of transaction through the internet, followed by cash withdrawal, various payments, including bills, and mobile recharge, according to BB data.

The central bank's data also shows that internet banking for adding money to wallets, payments, mobile recharging and sending money through mobile financial services has been growing.

Cash withdrawal through digital banking has been falling, indicating a growing preference for digital transactions over cash.

"This reflects increasing digital

adoption by people. Apps are offering scope to customers to do banking while staying at home," said Md Arup Haider, deputy managing director & head of retail banking at City Bank PLC, which has the Citytouch app.

"We, banks, are also adding newer features in the apps by understanding customers' choices and preferences."

Md Shafquat Hossain, deputy managing director and head of retail banking at Mutual Trust Bank PLC, said banks are encouraging customers to opt for digital banking to supplement the central bank's goal of digital transactions.

The BB has set a target of settling at least 75 percent of retail transactions through digital channels by 2027.

"We are also pushing because digital transactions cut costs. Banks can position their employees in sales roles and provide better services to their clients," he said. "This is benefiting customers too, as they can conduct banking anytime and from anywhere."

He said his bank's MTB Neo app has 2.8 lakh users and they recorded Tk 4,000 crore in transactions through its app last month.

"When a customer opens an account with us, we also open the app for them," said the official, adding that the private bank aims to increase the number of its app users to 5 lakh by the end of this year.

Expressing optimism that digital transactions will increase, he said, "It is

going to be a reality. Those who do not want to do internet banking will have to do so in the coming days."

Md Mahiul Islam, deputy managing director and head of retail banking at BRAC Bank, said they offer BRAC Bank's app Astha, launched four years ago. It has over 12 lakh users. The bank offers 120 plus integrated services, and the volume of monthly transactions through the app is Tk 20,000 crore.

"The need to visit branches for banking will reduce gradually. Cash transactions will fall," he said.

Bankers said the risk of falling into the trap of fraud is there, and banks are enhancing the guardrails to protect customers.

EBL MD Iftekhar said that despite strong growth, several infrastructural and experience-related challenges need to be addressed to ensure long term adoption and trust in internet banking.

"Simplifying and streamlining customer onboarding remains a key priority, as app-based banking usage is still largely concentrated in metropolitan areas. Limited digital literacy, particularly among rural and semi-urban populations, continues to slow wider adoption."

In addition, inconsistent internet connectivity outside major cities, as well as rising cybersecurity and data protection concerns, present ongoing challenges for the digital banking ecosystem, he added.

Why US geopolitical uncertainty matters for the dollar

REUTERS, London

Donald Trump's new brand of imperialism doesn't sit well with the dollar. The greenback dropped against other major currencies as the US president talked about taking control of Greenland, and continued falling even after he backed down. The issue is less that geopolitical animosity can unseat the dollar as the world's dominant currency, and more that it can erode a key benefit: financial surveillance and sanctions power.

Taken since the end of 2024, the dollar has fallen roughly 13 percent against the euro. Though often attributed to the "Liberation Day" tariffs Trump announced in April of last year, the slide began two months earlier, not long after US Vice President JD Vance signalled a retreat from Washington's commitment to defend Europe. It suggests the market sees a link between a more US-centric foreign policy and the greenback's global dominance: namely, if the world's police force retreats, perhaps international use of its currency does too. A more extreme version of the same idea, which was raised by a controversial Deutsche Bank research note during the Greenland crisis, is that Europe would dump some of its \$14 trillion of US financial assets.

Replacing the dollar on a grand scale seems far-fetched, though. Even if the US were matched in GDP by China or the euro zone, its financial openness, legal protections and issuance of Treasuries as a single safe asset – unlike Europe's fragmented sovereign bond market – would still leave the dollar without challengers. Despite some recent moves by foreign central banks to diversify, 57 percent of global official reserves are in dollars. Liabilities matter even more: 49 percent of cross-border loans and 46 percent of international bonds use the greenback. The dollar appears in 89 percent of foreign exchange trades and, for the average country, on 62 percent of export invoices.

Most of these figures, which come



Despite some recent moves by foreign central banks to diversify, 57 percent of global official reserves are in dollars.

PHOTO: AFP/FILE

from the Bank for International Settlements and the International Monetary Fund, have been stable since at least 1999. It gives Washington a powerful lever: because payments ultimately pass through correspondent bank accounts in New York, the US Treasury has been able to monitor flows and block transactions of North Korean entities, Venezuelan institutions and Hezbollah-linked networks. It has also frozen assets and imposed sanctions, as against Iran in 2012 and Russia in 2022. And, because allied nations face similar exposures in their banks, they are effectively forced to cooperate.

US authorities in 2014 slapped France's BNP Paribas with a \$9 billion penalty linked to violating American sanctions on Sudan, Cuba and Iran.

This echoes the work of German economist Georg Friedrich Knapp, who in 1905 argued that a state's ability to extract taxes and fines is what gives its currency domestic value. Through sanctions, the US applies a version of this internationally, with the world's most advanced military ensuring its ability to collect.

Defence capabilities and currency power have a close relationship. The presence of dollars and euros in other nations' global currency reserves roughly matches US and European governments' share of military

spending since 1971, according to the SIPRI Military Expenditure Database. One explicit example of the link was the 1974 US-Saudi accord, which set the terms of economic co-operation between the two sides. It involved American military support in exchange for the Gulf state investing in Uncle Sam's debt.

Yet for many countries, particularly in Europe, the US is no longer a reliable provider of military security. In other words, the international version of Knapp's theory may now start working in reverse. An unpredictable and unreliable American defence guarantee gives governments in Europe and elsewhere less of an incentive, on the margin, to use greenbacks. As Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney said in a speech at the World Economic Forum last week, great powers using "financial infrastructure as coercion" sparks a search for autonomy.

What does this mean for the United States? The risk isn't really a loss of financial benefits, which are surprisingly elusive beyond the profit American banks get from intermediating foreign transactions. Often cited is the US's ability to borrow cheaply from abroad, but this may just be skewed by the tax-avoidance strategies of multinationals.

Gold climbs, silver jumps 8%

REUTERS

Gold rose on Tuesday as geopolitical uncertainty underpinned safe-haven demand, while silver surged 8 percent to hover near all-time highs.

Spot gold climbed 1.6 percent to \$5,092.70 per ounce, as of 0710 GMT, after scaling a record \$5,110.50 on Monday. It broke through the \$5,100 mark for the first time in the previous session.

US gold futures for February delivery edged 0.1 percent higher to \$5,088.40 per ounce.

"Trump's disruptive policy approach this year is playing into the hands of precious metals as a defensive play. The threats of higher tariffs to Canada and South Korea are doing enough to keep gold a safe-haven choice," said Tim Waterer, KCM Trade's chief market analyst.

Escalating trade tensions on Monday, US President Donald Trump said he would raise tariffs on South Korean auto, lumber, and pharmaceutical imports to 25 percent, while criticising Seoul for failing to enact a trade deal with Washington.

This was after he threatened tariffs on Canada in the backdrop of a thawing relationship with China, following Canadian PM Mark Carney's visit to the country earlier this month.

"(Gold's rally) points to a material geopolitical, or uncertainty premium now embedded in gold prices, driven less by cyclical factors and more by the persistent uncertainty around geopolitics," Christopher Wong, a strategist at OCBC said in a note.

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How to raise revenue without hurting growth

MASUD KHAN

As Bangladesh looks toward its next government, fiscal policy will be central to the economic debate. Rising development needs, climate vulnerability, and higher debt servicing costs make stronger domestic revenue mobilisation unavoidable. Yet the real question is not whether Bangladesh needs more revenue, but how it can raise it without undermining private investment, growth, and jobs.

Bangladesh's tax-to-GDP ratio, stuck at around 8.9 percent, remains among the lowest in Asia. This chronic weakness limits the state's ability to invest in critical sectors. The common response is to search for new taxes or higher rates. That approach, however, risks extracting vitality from an economy already facing global and domestic headwinds. A more sustainable solution lies in fixing the plumbing of the existing tax system.

Bangladesh effectively operates two economies side by side. A small group of compliant taxpayers, mainly salaried employees and formal firms, carry a disproportionate burden, while a vast potential base remains outside the net. Fewer than one percent of the population file income tax returns. Affluent professionals, urban property owners, and many high-income self-employed individuals are lightly taxed or not taxed at all.

Meanwhile, the state relies heavily on tax at source, regressive import duties and indirect taxes because they are easier to collect.

Many citizens ask a simple question: what do I get for my taxes? Without visible improvements in service delivery, fairness, and accountability, voluntary compliance will remain weak. Revenue mobilisation cannot be separated from expenditure quality and governance.

Policy distortions further weaken the system. The widespread use of Statutory Regulatory Orders has created a discretionary, opaque, and unpredictable tax regime.

For investors, uncertainty and uneven enforcement often matter more than tax rates. Similarly, the VAT system, fragmented by multiple rates, truncated bases, and exemptions, has become complex and prone to evasion. For small and medium enterprises, VAT is feared less for its cost than for its paperwork, discretion, and compliance risks.

This exposes a major blind spot in Bangladesh's revenue debate: the exclusion of millions of small traders and micro entrepreneurs.

Although the informal sector accounts for over one-third of GDP and employs most workers, tax compliance for small businesses remains administratively burdensome. Income tax filing often requires professional help, while VAT compliance is even more complex, keeping most traders outside the system. At the same time, the revenue administration lacks the manpower and technology to monitor millions of micro-enterprises, making universal compliance unrealistic.

A practical solution is tax simplification. Countries such as India, Indonesia, Turkey, Brazil, and Kenya have broadened their tax base through flat-rate or simplified regimes. India's GST Composition Scheme, for example, brought millions into the formal system by allowing traders to pay a low, fixed share of turnover with minimal paperwork.

A Bangladesh-specific model could combine a fixed annual income tax with a simplified VAT based on shop size, turnover band, or location, supported by digital payment incentives. This would reduce fear of audits, ease pressure on the National Board of Revenue, and expand the tax base. Rapid growth in e-commerce and platform-based work requires clear, predictable tax rules that do not stifle innovation.

Beyond SMEs, Bangladesh must also address hard-to-tax but high potential areas: the digital economy, property, land, and wealth. Ultimately, the fiscal challenge is not just about revenue, but governance. The next government has an opportunity to move away from coercion to a fair, predictable, compliance-based system. The reward is not just higher revenue, but a stronger social contract, a more legitimate state, and a more competitive private sector.

The writer is the chairman of Unilever Consumer Care