

# Prime Bank holds seminar at Gazipur Agricultural University

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Prime Bank PLC, in collaboration with Gazipur Agricultural University (GAU) and the GAU Career Club, recently organised a seminar, titled "Empowering Youth", on the university campus in Gazipur.

Held under the initiative of its flagship platform, PrimeAcademia, the event reaffirmed the bank's commitment to nurturing future-ready young talent by integrating academic learning with real-world financial knowledge, according to a press release.

Notably, PrimeAcademia serves as a customised service platform for stakeholders in the education sector, aiming to bridge the gap between academia and industry.

Through this platform, students, faculty members and related stakeholders gain opportunities to acquire practical knowledge and real-life experience.

The initiative places special emphasis

on enhancing financial literacy, career readiness, leadership development and strengthening academia-industry collaboration.

Shaila Abedin, senior executive vice-president and head of liability at Prime Bank PLC, inaugurated the seminar, where she highlighted the importance of financial discipline, continuous self-development, ethical leadership and women's empowerment.

Addressing young students, particularly women, she encouraged informed financial decision-making and the effective use of digital financial services to achieve financial independence.

MM Mahbub Hasan, senior vice-president and head of financial inclusion and school banking at the bank, emphasised that financial inclusion goes beyond merely opening bank accounts; rather, it is a comprehensive process of expanding opportunities, reducing inequality and ensuring sustainable economic participation.



Shaila Abedin, senior executive vice-president and head of liability at Prime Bank PLC, presents a crest to Prof Mohammad Sharif Raihan, director of the Students' Welfare at Gazipur Agricultural University, on the university campus in Gazipur recently.

PHOTO: PRIME BANK

# Nagad widens rural bill payment coverage

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Nagad Limited, one of the country's leading mobile financial service (MFS) providers, has brought additional 20 regional offices of the Bangladesh Rural Electrification Board (BREB) under its expanded digital electricity bill payment coverage.

With this expansion, customers of 29 Palli Bidyut Samities (PBSs) across 24 districts will be able to settle their electricity bills using the Nagad platform.

Earlier, customers of nine PBSs had already been paying their bills through the MFS provider.

Following the inclusion of the new cooperatives, more than half of the country's rural electricity customers will now have access to bill payment services via Nagad, according to a press release.

Nearly 80 percent of Bangladesh's electricity consumers are served under BREB, and the MFS provider, Nagad, has more than 80 million customers nationwide.

The two institutions have been working together since signing an agreement in 2023 to enhance customer convenience.

Customers can access the service through the Nagad app by selecting the "Bill Pay" option, choosing "Electricity", and then selecting "Palli Bidyut Postpaid" to complete the transaction.

With the latest addition, customers of the newly enlisted PBSs can now enjoy instant rural electricity bill payment services through the platform.



# Aarong opens 33rd outlet in Savar



Tamara Hasan Abed, managing director of BRAC Enterprises, inaugurates Aarong's 33rd outlet in Savar, Dhaka yesterday.

PHOTO: AARONG

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Aarong, one of the country's leading fashion and lifestyle retail chains, yesterday launched a new outlet in Savar, Dhaka. This marks the company's 33rd outlet, according to a press release.

Tamara Hasan Abed, managing director of BRAC Enterprises, inaugurated the outlet as the chief guest.

"The opening of our Savar outlet has been long anticipated and reflects the remarkable growth and transformation of the region," said Tamara.

"With this new range, we want to get closer to our customers, make Aarong more accessible, and deepen our relationship with the communities we serve. Savar is a vibrant blend of tradition

and modern life, and we brought this outlet to express solidarity with that spirit," she added.

Spanning approximately 11,000 square feet across two floors, the new outlet is designed to meet the growing needs of customers in the Savar area and provide a complete retail experience.

The Savar outlet features Aarong's popular sub-brands -- Taga, Taga Man and Aarong Earth -- along with a wide collection of clothing, jewellery, home décor, accessories, and skincare products.

Crafted with a masterful blend of contemporary design and traditional craftsmanship, this thoughtfully planned space is set to become an integrated destination for fashion, lifestyle, and conscious living for customers.

# Japan's GDP falls short of expectations

AFP, Tokyo

Japanese economic growth fell short of market expectations in late 2025, official data showed Monday, adding to pressure on Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi to stimulate activity after her recent election landslide.

Gross domestic product (GDP) in the world's fourth-biggest economy expanded by just 0.1 percent in the fourth quarter, undershooting market forecasts of growth of 0.4 percent.

The growth follows a contraction of 0.7 percent -- revised downwards from an earlier reading of minus 0.6 percent -- in the previous quarter.

Growth in private consumption, and private residential and corporate investments, contributed to the expansion, according to the cabinet office data.

In calendar 2025, Japan's economy grew 1.1 percent, after a 0.2 percent contraction in 2024, the data from the cabinet office showed.

On an annualised basis, GDP expanded by 0.2 percent in the three months through December, significantly weaker than the median economist estimate of 1.6 percent growth.

# Al-Arafah Islami Bank, Seamax partner to aid farmers

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Al-Arafah Islami Bank PLC has signed a memorandum of understanding with Seamax Limited, a company that provides farmers, ranchers, private foresters and agricultural producers with online self-service applications and farming materials, to offer comprehensive support in the production and marketing of agricultural crops.

SM Abu Jafar, deputy managing director of Al-Arafah Islami Bank PLC, and Hiron Nahar, chairman of Seamax Limited, signed the agreement at a ceremony held at the bank's head office on Sunday, according to a press release.

Under the agreement, both organisations will jointly contribute to the country's agricultural and rural development by extending integrated support services to farmers in crop production and marketing.

Shamsul Alam, director of Seamax Limited; Monirul Islam, senior vice-president and SME business head of the bank; Mahmud Riyad, vice-president and head of the Al-Arafah Rural Development Programme; and MM Rafiqul Islam, senior assistant vice-president, along with other senior officials from both organisations, were also present at the signing ceremony.



Hiron Nahar, chairman of Seamax Limited, and SM Abu Jafar, deputy managing director of Al-Arafah Islami Bank PLC, pose for a photograph after signing the memorandum of understanding at the bank's head office in Dhaka on Sunday.

PHOTO: AI-ARAFAH ISLAMI BANK

# ONE Bank organises 'Strategic Leadership Meet' in Dhaka



ASM Shahidullah Khan, chairman of ONE Bank PLC, poses for a group photograph with participants of the "Strategic Leadership Meet" at the Radisson Blu Water Garden Hotel in Dhaka recently.

PHOTO: ONE BANK

STAR BUSINESS DESK

ONE Bank PLC has outlined its strategic priorities for 2026 at a "Strategic Leadership Meet" held recently at the Radisson Blu Water Garden Hotel in Dhaka.

The daylong session brought together around 80 members of the bank's strategic leadership team to align on "Vision 2026", a roadmap for sustainable growth, innovation and excellence, according to a press release.

ASM Shahidullah Khan, chairman of ONE

Bank PLC, inaugurated the programme as the chief guest.

Muht Rahman, managing director of the bank, emphasised the importance of a unified and purpose-led approach and said, "Vision 2026 reflects our collective commitment to building a resilient and future-ready bank that prioritises growth with strong governance, embraces digital innovation and operational excellence."

"Together as ONE, we rise to deliver exceptional value to our customers and stakeholders with clarity, stability and purpose," he added.

Joining the session as a guest speaker, Kazi Mahmood Sattar, chairman of IDLC Finance PLC, reflected on his experience in steering transformation at leading commercial banks and shared his views on the evolving future of the country's banking industry.

The bank's strategic priorities for the year will focus on accelerating growth, strengthening governance, advancing digital transformation and innovation, and expanding core businesses to deliver excellence for its customers, regulators, people and communities, the release added.

Zahur Ullah, director and chairman of the executive committee of the bank, and Admiral (ret'd) Aurangzeb Chowdhury, independent director, along with other senior officials of the bank, were also present.

# India's US tariff parity

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tariff benefit," said Showkat Aziz Russell, president of the Bangladesh Textile Mills Association (BTMA).

His reasoning is straightforward. "The Trump administration said it will give the reciprocal tariff if the garment is made from imported US cotton and man-made fibre, but India is an exporter of cotton, not an importing nation."

Russell highlighted another critical detail: India imposes a 12 percent duty on cotton imports, while Bangladesh has zero duty on cotton imports. "So Bangladesh can enjoy better benefits as Bangladesh is a major importer of cotton."

Zaidi Sattar, economist and chairman of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh (PRI), largely agrees.

"Primarily, it is observed that Bangladesh's garment export to the US may not be affected too much because of the same facility being given to India. India is a cotton-exporting country, and Bangladesh is an importing nation."

However, Sattar acknowledged a complication: Bangladesh's import dependence means "the cost of production in Bangladesh is higher than in India."

**INDIA EXPANDS, BANGLADESH HOLDS FIRM**

India has been steadily expanding its presence in the US apparel market, and the numbers are striking.

According to the US Fashion Industry Association's (USFIA) Fashion Industry Benchmarking study in 2025, cited on February 6 this year by Vogue Business,

77 percent of surveyed US fashion brands and retailers reported sourcing from India in 2025, with 60 percent planning to expand sourcing through 2027.

India captured 6.5 percent of US apparel imports by value in the first 11 months of 2025, up from 5.7 percent in 2022, according to US International Trade Commission data.

The country has become the third-largest supplier of men's cotton knit tops to the US market, behind Vietnam and Bangladesh, with strong performance in women's blouses, babywear, and home textiles.

India's apparel shipments to the US reached approximately \$5.33 billion in fiscal year 2024-2025, roughly a third of the country's total apparel exports.

A Sakthivel, chair of India's Apparel Export Promotion Council (AEP), told Vogue Business that if the proposed tariff reduction to an effective 18 percent is implemented, it could unlock as much as \$3 billion in additional annual business.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh continues to gain ground. As the third-largest exporter by value, Bangladesh supplied approximately 10.6 percent of US apparel imports in the first five months of 2025, up from 9.2 percent during the same period in 2024.

In January-November of last year, garment exports from Bangladesh to the US rose to \$7.60 billion, representing 12.43 percent growth compared to the same period in 2024.

The USFIA benchmark study showed that 53 percent of respondents expressed interest in expanding apparel

sourcing from Bangladesh over the next two years, up from 48 percent in the 2024 survey.

US fashion companies generally regard Bangladesh as a leading sourcing destination for low-cost, bulk items, particularly basic categories such as knit cotton shirts and trousers.

**THE REAL VULNERABILITIES**

Perhaps the more pressing concerns for Bangladesh lie elsewhere. Despite cost advantages, sourcing from Bangladesh is still perceived to carry relatively high risks in terms of social and environmental compliance, according to the USFIA study.

More worryingly, respondents expressed concern that apparel imports from Bangladesh may face future US trade restrictions, likely due to the country's growing trade surplus with the US and perceived heavy reliance on Chinese textile raw materials.

The evidence suggests the truth lies somewhere between exporter anxiety and expert reassurance. India's tariff parity does create new competitive pressure, particularly given its lower production costs and strong government support.

But the structural economics, India's role as a cotton exporter versus Bangladesh's position as an importer, may blunt the immediate impact of tariff parity.

The real test will be whether Indian manufacturers find it economically viable to import US cotton despite their domestic supply, just to access the zero-tariff benefit.

# China sees strong rebound

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"The studio represents a significant long-term investment, underscoring our confidence in the strength and future growth of China's chemicals industry," said Puay Koon Chia, president for Dow in the Asia-Pacific region.

SAFE data also showed that China posted a current account surplus of \$734.9 billion in 2025, which refers to the excess of a country's exports of goods and services, investment

income and transfers over its imports and outward payments. Surplus in trade in goods came in at \$1.0234 trillion last year.

On a renminbi basis, the current account surplus amounted to 5.24 trillion yuan (\$759 billion), roughly equivalent to 3.7 percent of the country's GDP -- which hit 140.19 trillion yuan in 2025 -- up from 2.2 percent in 2024.

While export growth propped up the surplus, Liu Chunsheng, an associate professor of

international economics at the Central University of Finance and Economics, said that China's aim is to maintain overall balance in its balance of payments, rather than run excessive surpluses, which could create pressure on both the economy and the renminbi.

Liu said that authorities have sought to ease the surplus by expanding imports, strengthening domestic demand and deepening opening-up in the services sector.

# Stocks see minor correction

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days, including yesterday, which is not a good sign for the market, he added.

By rising around 10 percent, New Line Clothing, Bangladesh Industrial Finance, and S Alam Cold Rolled Steel Mills made it to the top gainers' list. All three companies belong to the Z category.

On the other hand,

ICB Islamic Bank, Prime Textile, and Ring Shine were the top losers, dropping 10 percent, 6 percent, and 5 percent respectively.

Although all indices of the DSE fell, the major index of the Chittagong Stock Exchange (CSE), CASPI, rose. It gained 7 points to reach 15,526. Among the traded issues, 116 rose, 90 fell, and 22 remained unchanged.