

ByteDance valued at \$550b

REUTERS, New York/Hong Kong

Investment firm General Atlantic is selling an equity stake in ByteDance in a deal that values the Chinese social media giant at \$550 billion, two people with knowledge of the matter said, marking a dramatic rise in the privately held shares.

The potential stake divestment will be the first since the Trump administration cleared the sale of the US interests of ByteDance's TikTok unit in January, and marks a 66 percent jump in value since a share buyback last year priced the company at more than \$330 billion.

It also represents a 15 percent jump from a secondary market deal, which refers to the sale of shares in unlisted companies by existing shareholders to another investor, in November last year that valued ByteDance at \$480 billion, according to sources last month.

General Atlantic, an early 2017 investor in ByteDance, has begun selling part of its stake in recent weeks

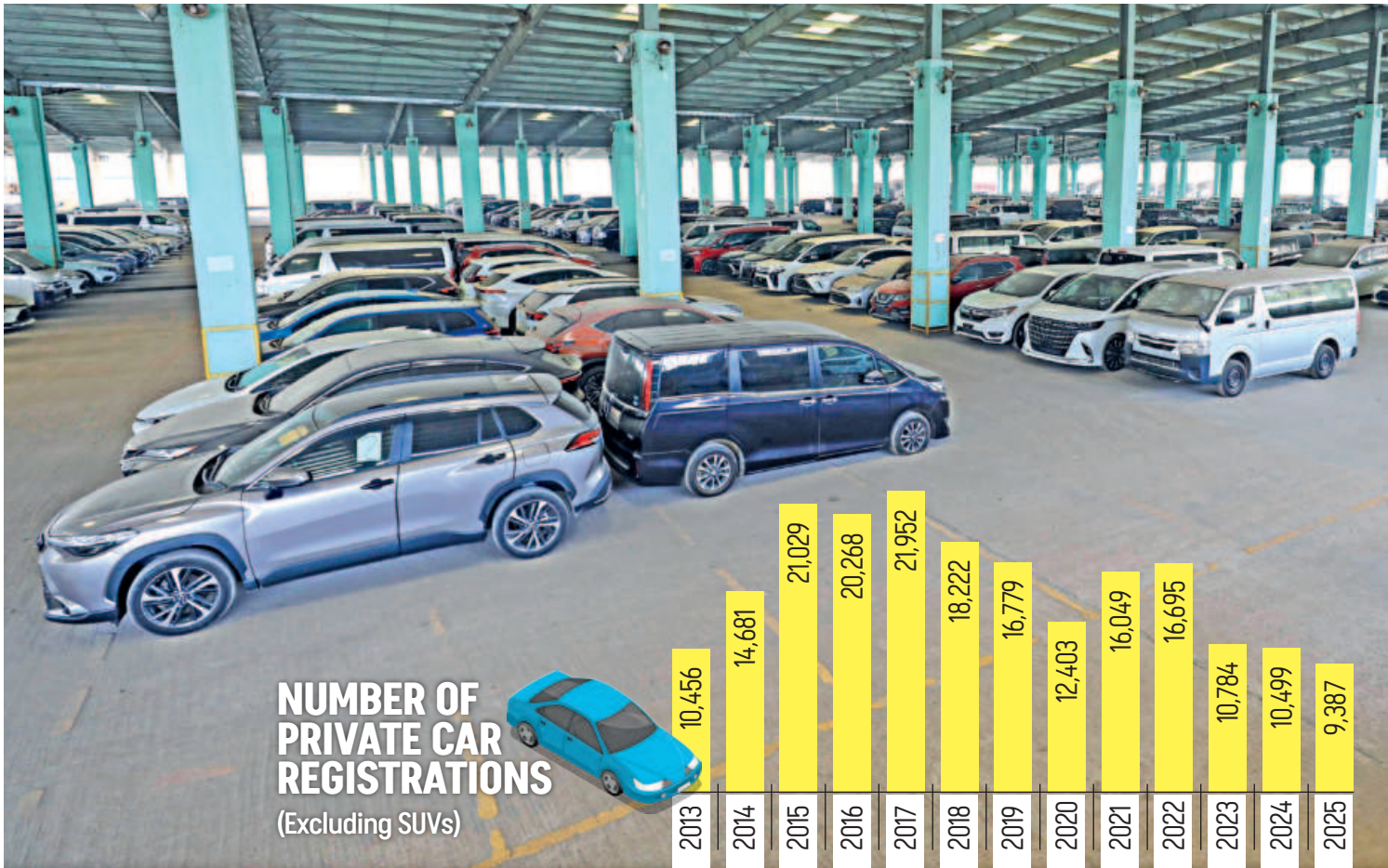
General Atlantic, which first invested in ByteDance in 2017 when the company was valued at about \$20 billion, started the process to sell some of its shares in recent weeks and hopes to close the sale in March, said one of the sources.

Details of the financial terms of the stake sale, General Atlantic's shareholding in ByteDance, and how much the New York-based investment firm will own in the social media company after the transaction were not immediately known.

The planned transaction underscores a sharp and sustained rise in the private market valuation of ByteDance, and bolsters the prospects for its other investors who are expected to enjoy a windfall when the company eventually makes its public market debut.

The sources declined to be named as they were not authorised to speak to the media. ByteDance did not respond to a Reuters request for comment, while General Atlantic declined to comment on the proposed share sale.

Valuations of an unlisted company can vary widely in secondary market transactions, but any such new trade is seen as a test of investor appetite for the company's shares.



Car sales hit 13-year low amid economic strain

Higher prices, supply chain disruptions, rising borrowing costs slowed market, insiders say

JAGARAN CHAKMA

Private passenger car sales in Bangladesh have plunged to the lowest level in 13 years, reflecting persistent economic headwinds, high import costs and tightening consumer purchasing power, according to market insiders and official data.

Fresh registrations of private passenger cars fell to 9,387 units in 2025, down from 10,499 in 2024 and 10,784 in 2023, according to data from the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority.

Industry insiders say the figure marks the lowest annual registration since 2011, making 2025 the weakest year in 13 years, reflecting the drop in car sales.

The slump highlights a prolonged downturn in a market that had grown steadily before the pandemic. Insiders blamed weak business conditions, higher vehicle prices due to dollar appreciation, increased import duties and rising living costs for the decline.

Mohammed Shahidul Islam, chairman of HNS Group, says a combination of economic stress and political uncertainty has led to a sharp decline in vehicle sales.

"The overall business environment in the country has been affected," he said. "Last year, the law-and-order situation was weak, and supply chains were disrupted. Our own supply chain was also affected."

He added that the money market was severely squeezed, creating widespread unease. "There was fear and uncertainty. Liquidity tightened, and people became cautious about spending," he said.

According to Bangladesh Bank data, consumer lending rates rose to between 12 and 15 percent in 2025, up from 8 to 9 percent in 2022.

Rising borrowing costs further dampened demand. "Loan interest rates increased, and the cost of funds went up significantly," Islam,

also former secretary general of Bangladesh Reconditioned Vehicles Importers and Dealers Association (BARVIDA), said, adding that higher financing costs discouraged consumers from taking car loans.

At the same time, vehicle prices surged due to currency depreciation. "The dollar appreciated sharply – at one point by nearly 40 percent. A car that used to sell for Tk 16 lakh rose to around Tk 24 lakh," he said, citing the example of entry-level models.

According to Islam, political instability, street protests and business disruptions also eroded consumer confidence. "When there is uncertainty and businesses face harassment, people postpone major purchases," he said.

Fresh registrations of private passenger cars fell to 9,387 units in 2025, down from 10,499 in 2024 and 10,784 in 2023

"All these factors combined have led to the drop in sales," he added.

Reaz Rahman, managing director of Reaz Motors, said vehicle sales last year were the lowest in 13 years, describing the market as "extremely slow".

He attributed the downturn to rising costs, political uncertainty and tight banking conditions. Although car prices had already increased two to three years ago, further depreciation of the taka against the US dollar has pushed costs up by around 30 percent over the past two years.

"As the dollar rate increased by over 30 percent, import costs automatically went up. Duties also rose accordingly," he said, adding that many vehicles have moved beyond the purchasing power of middle-income buyers.

Rahman, the current secretary general of BARVIDA, said instability in the political

and banking sectors over the past two years weakened consumer confidence. The prolonged interim government tenure further dampened business sentiment.

He also highlighted supply constraints in Japan, the main source of reconditioned cars. Bangladesh allows imports of vehicles up to five years old, but production disruptions during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2021 and 2022 have made eligible models scarce and expensive.

"When we bid for those cars, prices are very high," he said.

Rahman urged the government to allow imports of vehicles up to seven or eight years old to ease supply, lower prices, and increase revenue.

Arif Khan Bipu, managing director of Motors Bay, says financial hardship and weak business sentiment are the main reasons behind the slowdown in vehicle sales.

"In my view, people are reluctant to spend large amounts of cash," he said. Buying a car worth Tk 40 lakh to Tk 60 lakh ties up significant funds, while taking a loan creates repayment pressure. "When business is slow, customers worry about how they will service instalments. This financial strain is a key factor."

He said the broader economic slowdown has affected all sectors, including automobiles. Under a temporary government arrangement, large-scale investments and liquidity flows tend to weaken, discouraging big-ticket purchases.

The taka's depreciation against the US dollar has pushed up the cost of completely built units (CBUs), making new vehicles significantly more expensive for middle- and upper-middle-class consumers, he added.

Although there has been a shift in market share with the rise of Chinese and electric brands, Bipu said official data shows overall vehicle purchases have declined.

What US tariff ruling means for Bangladesh

MOHIUDDIN RUBEL

This roller coaster began on April 2, 2025, when the United States imposed broad reciprocal tariffs under emergency powers. It seemed to stabilise on February 9, 2026 with a reciprocal trade agreement with Bangladesh. The drama returned on February 20, when the US Supreme Court, in a 6 to 3 decision in Learning Resources, Inc. v. Trump, struck down Trump's IEEPA based tariffs. For a moment, relief from higher duties appeared possible. Within hours, the White House moved to keep most tariffs in place under a different legal route.

The court ruled that IEEPA does not authorise broad, across the board tariffs. Setting tariffs is primarily the responsibility of Congress, not something a president can do by declaring an economic emergency. Importers such as Learning Resources argued that the president had exceeded what Congress intended, and they prevailed. The administration had anticipated the setback and was ready to pivot.

On the same day, it unveiled a two-track approach: a short-term bridge and a longer-term plan.

Under Section 122 of the 1974 Trade Act, the president can impose a temporary import surcharge of up to 15 percent for no more than 150 days, unless Congress extends it. A 10 percent global surcharge took effect on February 24, 2026 and can remain until around July 24 unless ended earlier. That deadline is now a key pressure point in negotiations.

For the longer term, Washington is shifting to Section 301 as the main legal basis for more durable, targeted tariffs. This relies on investigations and keeps Section 232 security tariffs, anti-dumping duties and safeguards in play. When Section 122 authority expires, countries without new agreements may not see tariffs fall. They could instead face longer term Section 301 rates of 25 to 50 percent, alongside other remedies. The present 10 percent surcharge is therefore a temporary bridge, not a settlement.

Washington first used IEEPA for speed, avoiding lengthy Section 301 investigations while holding that option in reserve to press for early deals. After the Supreme Court dismantled that approach, the United States did not retreat from tariffs. It signalled that once Section 122 ends, Section 301 will take centre stage.

For Bangladesh, the earlier agreement has not yet been implemented, and several steps remain before it takes effect. Its future is uncertain. In the short term, Bangladesh is likely to face the 10 percent global tariff for the full 150 days. After that, a fresh negotiation could deliver improved terms. If no deal is activated, Bangladesh risks higher, longer-term Section 301 tariffs, potentially above the earlier 19 percent rate, along with other trade remedies.

Washington will seek to secure protection for its firms and supply chains. Dhaka will aim for more flexible commitments than those in the previous understanding. It is also likely that the United States will expect compliance with previously agreed terms, including the 19 percent tariff under the initial deal.

The United States remains Bangladesh's largest single-country export market, built on a long and mutually beneficial trade relationship. Any dispute should be resolved through dialogue and compromise to preserve trust, protect market access and safeguard long-term prospects.

If space remains for renewed negotiation, Bangladesh could pursue a three-pillar strategy to move from low-cost supplier to strategic partner.

First, cotton apparel reciprocity: use US cotton in apparel production in exchange for zero tariffs on those garments. This would support US farmers and return higher-value apparel to the US market, while giving Bangladesh a competitive edge. Second, calibrated managed trade: targeted and economically justified purchase commitments, such as aircraft or LNG, to help narrow the trade deficit and deepen interdependence, without exceeding fiscal limits. Third, geopolitical alignment: secure ports and digital infrastructure with US-aligned technology, strengthening the relationship into a broader strategic partnership and reducing the risk of future trade shocks.

The writer is a former director of BGMEA and additional managing director at Denim Expert Ltd. He can be reached at mohiuddinrubel@gmail.com

WTO to examine Chinese complaint over India batteries, e-vehicles

AFP, Geneva

The World Trade Organization said Tuesday it would establish an expert panel to examine a Chinese complaint over Indian incentive schemes in the automotive and renewable energy sectors.

The WTO said in a statement that its Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) had agreed during a meeting to set up a panel to review China's assertion that the Indian measures unfairly discriminate against foreign businesses and restrict trade, in violation of WTO rules.

The measures in question include incentives for the production of advanced chemistry cell batteries, automobile and auto components and electric vehicles.

China, which charged that the measures discriminated against the use of goods of Chinese origin, had back in October requested consultations with India to iron out the dispute. When that did not work, Beijing first asked the WTO last month to establish a panel of experts, but the request was blocked by India.

The DSB granted the second request on Tuesday.

Under WTO regulations, parties in a dispute can block a first request for an arbitration panel, but if the parties make a second request, it is all but guaranteed to go through.

India told Tuesday's DSB meeting that it regretted that China had pushed forward with its panel request, insisting it had participated in the earlier consultations in good faith.

REUTERS, London

The stock market is in a panic about the impact artificial intelligence will have on the jobs market. It's reminiscent of the "lump of labour fallacy" taught in high school economics. The lesson goes that even if technology disrupts industries and creates unemployment, consumers will gain from cheaper goods. Over time, savings are spent elsewhere, which helps create new jobs. But even if the AI hysteria is overdone, there is a real risk that fiscal and monetary policy will be too slow to fix short-term disruptions.

There are early signs of moderate AI damage to the workforce. In the US, changes in joblessness since 2022 correlate with adoption of AI in the Real Time Population Survey data, with a third of the increase coming from industries with above average use of the technology. The "information" sector – telecom operators, broadcasters and publishers – report 70 percent adoption and a 75 percent rise in unemployed workers.

This uptake, however, has rattled investors who worry that the software industry's business model will be threatened by Anthropic's Claude Code. Concerns widened on Monday sparked

by a widely circulated Substack post by Citrini Research which laid out an "intelligence crisis" in 2028. Citrini asked whether mass white collar displacement could trigger a collapse in spending that tanks profits across consumer sectors. The hit to GDP could be long lasting



Visitors interact with a humanoid robot that uses artificial intelligence, at a stand during the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) AI for Good Global Summit in Geneva on July 8, 2025.

PHOTO: AFP/FILE

Policy bazooka could fend off jobless AI world

because, even if retailers also embrace AI and workers shift into gig roles, the economy would become more capital heavy and skew gains even more starkly towards the rich, who run down less of their wealth than middle class workers spend out of income.

This echoes past theories, including that of Marxist economist Rosa Luxemburg. Yet historically, technology shocks have boosted GDP, not reduced it. Even if AI destroyed jobs at an unprecedented scale, that would imply steep falls in the cost of goods and services, raising real incomes. It could also make remaining jobs more stable, better paid and more prestigious, even those that are currently classified within the "gig economy."

Crucially, money can be snapped into existence, unlike scientific advancement. During the pandemic, Western economies largely shut down, yet unemployment and output quickly rebounded because governments injected fiscal stimulus worth over 6 percent of GDP. The lesson should have been that deficient demand can be managed with effective policy.

In 2026 that thinking seems off the table. The post-2022 global inflation spike, mostly driven by supply shortages, has turned officials and voters against activist fiscal policy. Budget deficits remain high because governments lack the political capital to raise taxes. But a willingness to widen them again to counter a diffuse, slow moving threat – unlike the Covid 19 virus – will probably be limited.