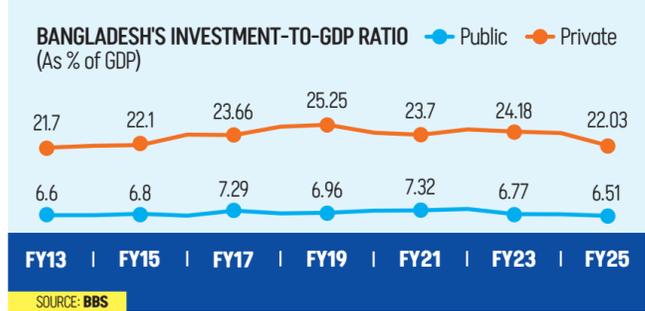


Star BUSINESS



Private investment hits 11-year low

Economists say decline threatens jobs and long-term economic growth prospects



SOHEL PARVEZ

Bangladesh's private investment fell for the third consecutive year, reaching 22.03 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the fiscal year 2024-25, the lowest level in 11 years, amid a weak investment climate and macroeconomic stress.

Public investment as a share of GDP, a measure of the final value of goods and services produced in the economy over a period, also declined for the third year due to slow implementation of the Annual Development Programme

(ADP).

It stood at 6.51 percent of GDP in FY25, the lowest since at least FY13, down from 6.74 percent a year earlier, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS).

Economists say that the falling investment trend indicates the creation of fewer jobs than required, especially for the growing number of young workers entering the labour market each year.

According to them, the investment decline also threatens future growth.

READ MORE ON B3

End LNG reliance or face debt trap: CPD

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The new government must end its policy of overemphasising liquefied natural gas (LNG) imports or risk repeating a damaging cycle of financial debt while falling behind on energy transition goals, the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) warned yesterday.

"Bangladesh should gradually shift priority from LNG import to domestic gas exploration to successfully drill 150 gas wells," CPD Research Director Khondaker Golam Moazzem said at a briefing on the social and economic policies expected of the new government, held at the think tank's Dhaka office.

He also called on the BNP-led government to withdraw any value added tax (VAT) on LNG imports in the next budget.

Criticising the BNP's election manifesto for

READ MORE ON B3

Extortion, gridlock hurting trade, investment

Business leaders call for improving law and order

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Business leaders and government officials at an event yesterday stressed the urgent need to improve the law-and-order situation and strengthen market management, warning that business confidence and sustainable economic growth will remain elusive unless immediate and effective measures are taken.

Speakers at the view-exchange

meeting organised by the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce & Industry (DCCI), titled "Necessity of Maintaining an Improved Law & Order Situation to Facilitate the Ease of Doing Business," said a stable security environment is vital for trade and investment.

They cited extortion, traffic congestion and weak market oversight as key challenges that are raising the cost of conducting business.

"There is no alternative to properly coordinating supply and demand in market management," said A HM Ahsan, chairman of the Bangladesh Competition Commission.

He emphasised the importance of accurate data on the use and distribution of essential goods, adding that a business-friendly environment reduces institutional costs for entrepreneurs and positively

READ MORE ON B3

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Bangladesh-Malaysia trade set for high-tech boost as exports near \$300m

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Bangladesh's exports to Malaysia have surged more than fivefold over the past decade, climbing from \$56 million to nearly \$300 million, reflecting deepening bilateral trade ties, said Mohd Shuhada Othman, high commissioner of Malaysia to Bangladesh.

He said the next phase of cooperation would centre on high tech collaboration in the semiconductor industry and stronger engagement in the global Halal economy.

The envoy made the remarks at the Silver Jubilee celebration marking the 25th anniversary of the Bangladesh-Malaysia Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BMCCI), held yesterday at the Sheraton Dhaka, according to a press release.

In his address, Othman commended BMCCI for supporting Malaysia's position as the ninth-largest investor in Bangladesh. He also unveiled the chamber's new logo as chief guest at the event.

Shabbir A Khan, president of BMCCI, expressed pride in the chamber's journey since its inception in 2001, describing the Silver Jubilee logo as a symbol of resilience, collaboration and forward-looking momentum for the next 25 years.

He paid tribute to the 12 founding



Mohd Shuhada Othman, high commissioner of Malaysia to Bangladesh, inaugurates the Silver Jubilee celebration marking the 25th anniversary of the Bangladesh-Malaysia Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BMCCI), at the Sheraton Dhaka yesterday.

PHOTO: BMCCI

members whose foresight laid the foundation of the chamber and acknowledged the contributions of past presidents and members to its steady growth. Looking ahead, Khan reaffirmed BMCCI's commitment to diversifying business engagement and strengthening

the longstanding ties between the two countries.

Over the past 25 years, BMCCI has worked to enhance strategic capabilities among business communities by organising investment forums, trade fairs, business delegation exchanges, seminars

and symposiums between Bangladesh and Malaysia.

Salahuddin Kasem Khan, former president and founding director of the chamber, was also present, alongside senior officials, business leaders and executives from various sectors.

US producer inflation higher than expected

AFP, Washington

US producer prices rose more than analysts expected in January, government data showed Friday, boosted by services costs.

The producer price index (PPI) climbed 0.5 percent on a month-on-month basis, the Department of Labor said, picking up slightly from December's revised figure and above the 0.3 percent that economists expected.

From a year ago, PPI was up 2.9 percent, inching down slightly from December's 3.0 percent.

"Producer prices rose more than expected in January as service-related costs and stronger pricing power push up margins received by wholesalers and retailers," said Nationwide senior economist Ben Ayers.

"But a broad-based push higher from tariffs remains absent," he said.

Besides trade services, prices for transportation and warehousing services also climbed.

This comes as President Donald Trump's sweeping tariffs -- imposed since he returned to the White House last year -- continue to filter through the economy.

While they have not caused a widespread consumer inflation surge, firms have flagged higher business costs and difficulties planning due to policy uncertainty.

Prices for goods dropped 0.3 percent month-on-month on a decline in energy costs, the Labor Department said.

This was "the largest decrease since falling 0.7 percent in March 2025," the report added.

But excluding the volatile food and energy sectors, the index for goods advanced 0.7 percent.

Mastercard, Prime Bank launch numberless debit card



STAR BUSINESS DESK

Global digital payments provider Mastercard has partnered with Prime Bank PLC to launch Bangladesh's first numberless debit card through the bank's digital platform, Prime NOW, a move aimed at strengthening security, privacy and customer control in digital transactions.

Tanjil Chowdhury, chairman of Prime Bank PLC, and Syed Mohammad Kamal, country manager for Bangladesh at Mastercard, jointly inaugurated the card at a ceremony held yesterday in Dhaka, according to a press release.

Unlike conventional cards, the Prime NOW Mastercard debit card does not display the card number, CVV or expiry date, reducing the risk of skimming and data theft.

All details are securely stored in the Prime NOW app, protected by multi-layer authentication, including optional biometrics, and can be accessed instantly for online transactions.

The card features app-based controls such as QR activation, spending limits and digital reissuance, while a misplaced card carries no usable information.

Chowdhury said, "With the Prime NOW Numberless Card -- a first for Bangladesh -- we are breaking the status quo."

"This isn't just a card; it's a shift towards a digital-first lifestyle."

"We are moving from forced processes to empowered choices. As a storied institution, we are proud to lead the charge into this next era of banking," he added.

Kamal said, "The launch of Prime NOW Mastercard numberless debit card marks a significant milestone in the country's digital payments journey. As consumers look for greater privacy and seamless control, numberless technology offers a safer and more intuitive way to transact."

Cardholders also enjoy year-round benefits at over 10,000 Mastercard partner merchants nationwide and can personalise the card's design and e-commerce settings through the app.

Electro Mart launches Gree 'airy' inverter AC series

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Electro Mart Group has unveiled the new Gree "airy" series air conditioners in the local market, introducing a premium inverter range designed for energy efficiency and extreme weather performance.

The airy series -- available in 1.0, 1.5 and 2.0 tonne models -- will be sold through all display centres, retail outlets and partner showrooms of the company nationwide, according to a press release.

Md Nurul Afser, deputy managing director of Electro Mart Group, inaugurated the new series at a ceremony in Dhaka.

He said Gree has earned the trust of customers and is now the leading air conditioner brand in Bangladesh.

The Gree airy series is engineered to operate in temperatures of up to 68 degrees Celsius, supported by "G-Boost" technology.

With high Seasonal Energy Efficiency Ratio (SEER) ratings, the model is designed to ensure optimal cooling while reducing electricity consumption.

The unit features dual self-cleaning technology for both indoor and outdoor components, along with Wi-Fi and Bluetooth connectivity, voice control and "Surfing Louver" technology to deliver indirect and comfortable airflow.

Powered by an AI chip and G-Learning algorithm, the airy series adapts to users' habits to provide personalised cooling while saving up to 20 percent more energy compared to conventional inverter air

conditioners.

It also incorporates a Cold Plasma sterilisation system, which the company says can eliminate up to 93 percent of bacteria and viruses, helping maintain a healthier indoor environment.

Positioned as a top-tier solution for residential and light commercial use, particularly in hot climates, the airy series combines smart technology, energy efficiency and modern design.

Mohammed Nurussafa Babu, deputy managing director of the company; Mohammad Sazzad Un Newaz, director; Mahmudun Nabi Chowdhury, general manager of sales and marketing; and Zulfak Hossain, national sales manager of retail, along with other senior officials, were also present.



PHOTO: ELECTRO MART GROUP

Md Nurul Afser, deputy managing director of Electro Mart Group, inaugurates the new Gree "airy" series air conditioners in Dhaka recently.

Invitation of Tender

901 Central Workshop EME
Dhaka Cantonment

1. For yr 2025-2026 sealed quotations are invited from bonafide reputed and enlisted (Logistic area) firms of Bangladesh Army who all are renewed (2025-2026) of local repair of vehicles as below:

| Ser | Tender No. & date | Description of work | Date of selling Tender schedule | Opening date of tender |
|-----|--------------------------------|--|--|--|
| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
| a. | Tender No. Dt 01 February 2025 | a. BA No. 088312, 088479 & 088506 Trk 3 Ton Renault TRM-180.11 Necessary Spare Parts/ Equipment (As per schedule). b. BA No. 104024 Tank TPTIR 50 Ton Prime Mover Model: Renault KERAX-350.34T Necessary Spare Parts/Equipment (As per schedule). | According to PPR 2008 rule 61 (4) the schedule will be sold up to 14 days from the date of publication at the newspaper. | Tender will be opened on the 15th day of publication of the newspaper. |

2. The terms & conditions with technical specification are available at local purchase office in 901 Central Workshop EME, Dhaka Cantonment during office time. Two percent (2%) earnest money of the total tendered amount have to be deposited in the form of Bank Draft/Pay Order along with the tender in favour of Commandant, 901 Central Workshop EME, Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka. Interested firm has to purchase tender schedule from LP office of 901 Central Workshop EME, upto 1400 hours in every working day till last date of selling as mentioned in columns 4 (14 days from the date of publication at the newspaper). On the opening date (mentioned in column 5) at 1230 hours tender box will be opened in presence of intending bidders or their representatives (if any).

3. Participating firms must have past experience in doing the similar nature of work and experience certificate to be attached in tender.

4. If any vehicle/instrument shows any malfunction in the current financial year, the supplying firm will be bound to repair it again without demanding any financial support.

5. The package price offered by the firm participating in the tender will be considered as the lowest bidder.

6. Authority possessed all the rights to accept or reject any tender without assigning any reason thereof.

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Commandant
901 Central Workshop EME
Dhaka Cantonment

GD-431

India logs

FROM PAGE B4
"The relative ranking will also depend on other countries' growth rates and exchange rates as well," he said.

Faced with a dimming economic outlook, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has sought to bolster the economy by slashing income and consumption taxes which have helped rebound consumer spending in recent quarters.

New Delhi also managed to secure a trade deal with Washington in early February, which boosted sentiment around the rupee but came just weeks before the US Supreme Court struck down President Donald Trump's sweeping tariffs.

The GDP numbers are the first data released under a revised framework that New Delhi said better captures "the realities of a fast-changing economy".

The data overhaul has seen India shift its GDP base year to 2022-23 from 2011-12 and adopt more granular

price deflation to help quell concerns that earlier methods relied too heavily on the wholesale price index.

Growth calculations are now also based on sources of data including India's online tax and vehicle registration databases.

The government said the new data aligns official numbers "more closely with the structure and dynamics of today's economy".

The data revamp also sees New Delhi raising its growth projections for the current financial year that ends in March.

The Indian economy is now projected to grow 7.6 percent for the full fiscal year, up from a forecast of 7.4 percent published last month, a press release from the statistics ministry said.

The latest figures bring Modi closer to his goal of transforming India into a developed nation by 2047 -- a target that most analysts say would require the economy to record about 8 percent growth every year until then.

Invitation of Tender

EMEC&S, Saidpur Cantonment

1. Financial year 2025-2026 sealed quotations are invited from bonafide reputed and enlisted (Rangpur Area) firms of Bangladesh Army who all are renewed (2025-2026) of purchase equipment as below:

| Ser | Tender No. & date | Description of work | Date of selling tender schedule | Opening date of tender |
|-----|------------------------------------|---|--|---|
| (a) | (b) | (c) | (d) | (e) |
| 1. | Tender No. 01 dt: 17 February 2026 | a. 1x Indoor LED Display Module with Complete Accessories. b. 3x Temperature Control Unit 5 Ton. | According to PPR 2008 rule 61 (4) the schedule will be sold up to 14 days from the date of publication at the newspaper. | Tender will be opened on the 15th day of the publication newspaper. |

2. The terms & conditions with technical specification are available at (TSS office) EMEC&S Saidpur Cantonment during office time. Three percent (3%) earnest money of the total tendered amount have to be deposited in the form of Bank Draft/Pay Order along with the tender in favour of Commandant, EMEC&S Saidpur Cantonment, Saidpur. Interested firm has to purchase tender schedule from (TSS office) EMEC&S upto 1400 hours in every working day till last date of selling as mentioned in columns d (14 days from the date of publication at the newspaper). On the opening date (mentioned in column e) at 1230 hours tender box will be opened in presence of intending bidders or their representatives (if any).

3. Participating firms must have past experience in doing the similar nature of work and experience certificate to be attached in tender.

4. If the authority decides to purchase the same goods again in the current financial year, the supplying firm will be obliged to supply those at the same price.

5. The package price offered by the firm participation in the tender will be considered as the lowest bidder.

6. Authority preserves all the rights to accept or reject any tender without assigning any reason thereof.

আইএসপিআর/সেনা/১৯৫
২৭/০২/২৬

Commandant
EMEC&S
Saidpur Cantonment

GD-432

Bangladesh's RMG market share in EU rises to 21.57%

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHHA

The market share of Bangladesh in the European Union's (EU) apparel market increased to 21.57 percent in 2025 from 20.78 percent in 2024 thanks to the rising demand for locally made apparel items in the EU.

In 2025, Bangladesh retained its position as the second-largest garment supplier to the EU, shipping apparel worth 19.41 billion euros, up from 18.31 billion euros in 2024, according to Eurostat data.

China, the largest garment exporter, held a 29.54 percent market share by

exporting apparel worth 26.58 billion euros to the EU in 2025, Eurostat also reported. In 2025, the EU imported garment items worth 89.99 billion euros in total.

Turkey was the third-largest garment exporter to the EU in 2025, while India ranked fourth.

Govt to launch 'Probashi Card' soon

Will take steps to reopen closed labour markets, minister says

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The government will soon introduce a "Probashi Card" for expatriates, as promised in the election manifesto, and will take coordinated steps involving multiple ministries to reopen closed labour markets, Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Minister Ariful Haque Choudhury said yesterday.

The expatriates' welfare, foreign affairs, and home ministries will work together to find a quick solution to legalise around 25,000 undocumented Bangladeshis currently living in Spain, he said.

As per the prime minister's guidelines, the government has adopted a 180-day priority action plan to reopen closed labour markets, especially in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, and other countries where recruitment is currently suspended, he added.

The minister made the remarks while answering questions from journalists at the Sylhet Circuit House.

He further said that, under the prime minister's instruction, a standing committee has been formed on this issue, with the education ministry also included in the committee.

In response to another question, the minister said that within one month, the media will receive feedback regarding the reopening of the closed labour markets.

At the same press briefing, Commerce Minister Khandaker Abdul Muktadir said



The government has adopted a 180-day priority action plan to reopen closed labour markets, especially in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, and other countries where recruitment is currently suspended.

PHOTO: STAR/FILE

that the market for essential commodities is currently stable and the government hopes to keep it stable in the coming days.

Water Resources Minister Shahiduddin Chowdhury Anee noted that Sylhet is one of the zones under the water resources ministry,

comprising four districts: Sylhet, Habiganj, Moulvibazar, and Sunamganj.

He explained that this border area often experiences flooding as water flows in from across the border. Keeping the region free from floods is a major challenge.

Private investment hits 11-year low

FROM PAGE B1

"It is very concerning, especially at a time when we need to accelerate investment to create employment and boost exports," said M Masur Reaz, chairman and founder of Policy Exchange Bangladesh.

The investment-to-GDP ratio comes alongside an estimated economic growth of 3.49 percent, the lowest since the Covid year 2020, driven mainly by private consumption. The decline suggests overall investment has not kept pace with the growth of the economy.

Reaz attributed the fall in private investment to three main factors.

"Our investment environment is weak, and it was identified nearly a decade ago," he said, citing Bangladesh's ranking in the World Bank's ease of doing business at 176 out of 190 economies.

"From that day, comprehensive and targeted reforms were necessary. But they were implemented in an isolated and fragmented manner."

The economist added that investment depends on multiple factors, including licensing, policy predictability, land, energy, and trade facilitation.

The macroeconomic

crisis that began to unfold from 2023 further dampened investment sentiment, he said. Weak domestic demand, import contraction caused by the dollar shortage, and political instability ahead of the election all played a role.

"Foreign investors perceive a country as high-risk when a country suffers from a macroeconomic crisis," he said, noting that uncertainty increased after the mass uprising in July 2024 that led to the ousting of the Sheikh Hasina government.

"We have seen demonstrations and unrest, and they have affected the policy environment too. The whole fiscal year 2024-25 was full of uncertainty. The declaration of the general election date came in August of this fiscal year."

Reaz added that the recent demonstration at the Bangladesh Bank over the removal of the central bank governor could create a negative international perception, signalling fragility in decision-making and discipline.

Ashikur Rahman, principal economist at the Policy Research Institute (PRI) of Bangladesh, identified a weak business climate, infrastructure

bottlenecks, and waning competitiveness in international markets as production costs rose amid supply-side constraints.

He said governance breakdowns in the banking sector since around 2020 has severely distorted credit allocation.

"Instead of channelling funds toward productive small and medium-sized enterprises, the financial system became increasingly captured by entrenched economic oligarchs. Large-scale loan irregularities and weak oversight eroded confidence and crowded out genuine entrepreneurs."

Rahman added that small and mid-sized firms, traditionally the backbone of employment generation, found themselves sidelined from access to affordable finance.

"This created a perverse incentive structure in which politically connected borrowers benefited, while real sector innovators were marginalised."

He added that the decline in private investment as a percentage of GDP has profound implications for the country's economic development.

"Investment is the engine of productivity growth, job creation, and

structural transformation. A sustained decline weakens the economy's capacity to generate employment, particularly for a young and expanding labour force."

Rahmansaid it also limits technological upgrading and diversification beyond traditional sectors.

"Moreover, without robust private investment, growth becomes increasingly consumption-driven and fiscally strained. This is not sustainable, especially as Bangladesh approaches LDC graduation and faces tighter external financing conditions. Weak investment today translates into slower growth tomorrow, and slower growth amplifies challenges such as unemployment, underemployment, and poverty," he added.

Syed Akhtar Mahmood, former global lead for regulatory reforms at the World Bank Group, said the low investment rate is caused by a mix of short and long-term issues. While governments have tried to improve the investment climate, many fundamental problems remain, including regulatory hurdles and limited access to credit.

High interest rates, bank liquidity issues, and greater risk aversion have reduced the supply of credit.

"Even if investors were willing to borrow at the higher interest rates, they are not getting financing. Many investors, especially some large ones, have over-leveraged themselves by borrowing heavily when interest rates were low. These companies may not be in a position to take on large loans even if they see good investment potential," he said.

Mahmood added that energy shortages and political uncertainty have further dampened investor confidence.

"Low investment means our production capacity is not being augmented while our existing capacity is under-utilised," he commented.

According to Mahmood, this affects both current growth and future growth prospects. It also limits technological upgrading, research and development, skills development, and new product creation, all of which are necessary to enhance productivity and diversify the economy, including exports.

"When investors are struggling to carry out even basic investments, they are unlikely to invest in things that make our economy more competitive," he said.

Extortion, gridlock hurting trade

FROM PAGE B1

impacts product prices. He also called for closer cooperation with law enforcement agencies to maintain order.

Md Abdur Rahim Khan, administrator of FBCCI, said improving law and order and ensuring proper market management are essential for smooth business operations.

He said that stronger economic growth would help improve the political environment and reduce activities outside the legal framework, but stressed the need for prompt reforms to restore public

confidence. "Instability in law and order creates a crisis of confidence among businesses and discourages both local and foreign investment," said Shibir Bicitra Barua, additional secretary at the Ministry of Commerce.

He added that the ministry has undertaken initiatives to facilitate trade and investment, referring to the IPO Policy 2025-28 as an example.

"Development and business cannot progress without stable law and order," said Harun Or Rashid, deputy

commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police's Motijheel Division. He said authorities are focusing more on traffic congestion and extortion.

Referring to the rising number of vehicles, especially battery-powered auto-rickshaws, he said policy decisions are needed regarding how many such vehicles Dhaka can accommodate, along with proper charging and garage facilities.

Enforcement drives alone are not enough, and long-term solutions require technology-driven monitoring, Abdul Jalil,

director of programme and research at the Directorate of National Consumers' Right Protection (DNCRP), stressed. Citing recent price volatility in essential items, he said artificial price hikes often stem from unethical practices by a small group of traders.

He added that DNCRP has taken up a project under the commerce ministry to develop a digital monitoring system that will integrate complaint data and e-commerce transactions.

"The private sector has faced setbacks in recent years due to

contractionary monetary policy, deteriorating law and order, illegal extortion, corruption and bureaucratic complexities," said Taskeen Ahmed, president of DCCI. He urged the new government to prioritise trade and investment facilitation.

Abul Hashem, president of the Bangladesh Sugar Traders Association; Md Golam Mowla, president of the Bangladesh Edible Oil Traders Association; and Mohammad Ali Bhutto, president of the Moulvibazar Traders Association, among others, also spoke at the event.

End LNG reliance

FROM PAGE B1

proposing higher LNG imports and expanded LNG infrastructure, he warned that such moves would delay domestic gas exploration and pile up the country's financial burden.

Moazzem described the government's renewed interest in domestic coal exploration as "the most concerning issue" of all.

Both the BNP's manifesto and the new government's 100-day plan list coal extraction as a priority, which he said signals that Bangladesh is moving backwards on energy transition.

The CPD research director urged the government to immediately put a halt to any discussion or initiative on domestic coal extraction.

Instead, he recommended that the government adopt a decarbonisation plan that phases out previously contracted fossil-fuel power plants and commits to no further expansion of coal-based power generation.

END RELIANCE ON EXECUTIVE BRANCH

On governance, Moazzem said Bangladesh has long been "limping on one leg" - relying almost entirely on the executive branch while parliament remains largely sidelined.

"Unfortunately, the executive branch often tries to avoid its accountability and responsibility to the parliament," he said.

The policy expert urged the new government to make full use of the national parliament, strengthen parliamentary standing committees, and transform the bureaucracy from a "law-and-policy-making agency" into an effective implementing body.

He also flagged decentralisation as essential, noting that government decision-making and development

activities should be pushed beyond Dhaka "through participatory local government elections".

REMOVING MANSUR AS GOVERNOR A "WEAK STEP"

Moazzem also criticised the government's recent decision to remove Ahsan H Mansur as the central bank governor, stating that excluding a figure of his experience and competence was a "weak step".

Even if political differences existed, he said the appointment and removal process lacked transparency, and that "better options" were available.

The CPD research director called for a transparent, criteria-based process for appointing the Bangladesh Bank governor, including an independent selection committee that would recommend candidates to the government.

There are no defined selection criteria for appointing a governor at present.

INVESTMENT, TAX, LABOUR REFORMS

To boost investment, Moazzem recommended that the Ministry of Commerce and Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (Bida) operationalise a unified digital interface by integrating existing databases.

In addition, regulatory bodies - such as the National Board of Revenue (NBR), Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE), and Registrar of Joint Stock Companies and Firms (RJC) - should develop a common document management framework to cut duplication in business licensing.

The NBR should move away from a blanket flat corporate tax rate for listed companies and instead link tax benefits to performance indicators such as capital

investment, export growth, or employment generation, he added.

He suggested that NBR establish an expert committee comprising tax professionals, chartered accountants, and business representatives to regularly review and update the list of allowable deductions, expenditure caps, and definitions related to taxable income, ensuring they reflect current business realities.

He also called on the government to prioritise the recovery of assets laundered over the past decade through stronger legal, investigative, and diplomatic efforts.

On labour rights, Moazzem recommended creating a dedicated government fund to protect workers from abuses by state-owned or state-controlled enterprises, and mandating six months of fully paid maternity leave across all sectors.

He also proposed that the government's "Family Card" scheme prioritise households with working children, with cash transfers set above a child's average monthly earnings, on the condition that the child returns to school.

The Ministry of Social Welfare should lead the implementation of the scheme, supported by NGOs for identification and monitoring, he added.

DIGITAL INTEGRATION FOR FARMERS, EXPATS

For migrant workers, Moazzem called for a single digital compliance framework integrating certification, emigration clearance, and recruitment oversight, led by the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training and the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare.

The framework should include mandatory digital skill verification linked to passports, visas, contracts, and financial records.



AHQ, E IN C'S BRANCH, WORKS DIRECTORATE, DHAKA CANTONMENT
INVITATION FOR TENDERS

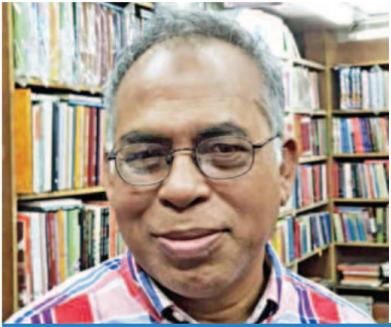
Notice no. 300/Ad/68/E-3/29 Dated: 22 February 2026.

MILITARY ENGINEER SERVICES

| | | | | | |
|--------|---|--|---|--|----------------------------------|
| 1. | Ministry/Division | Ministry of Defence | | | |
| 2. | Agency | Military Engineer Services | | | |
| 3. | Procuring Entity Name | E in C | | | |
| 4. | Procuring Entity District | Dhaka | | | |
| 5. | Procurement Method | Open Tendering Method (OTM) | | | |
| 6. | Budget and source of Funds | GOB | | | |
| 7. | Development Partners (if applicable) | None | | | |
| 8. | Project/Programme Name (if applicable) | Development of Garrison Engineer's Office and residential area | | | |
| 9. | Selling of tender will commence from | 01 March 2026 (During Office hour). | | | |
| 10. | Selling of tender will Close on | 11 March 2026 (During Office hour). | | | |
| 11. | Last date & time of submission of Tender | 12 March 2026 at 1200 hours. | | | |
| 12. | Date & time of opening of Tender | 12 March 2026 at 1230 hours. | | | |
| 13. | Name & Address of the Office(s) | | | | |
| | - Selling Tender Document | Tender Selling & Information Centre at GE (Army) Central Dhaka & AHQ, E in C's Branch, Works Directorate, Dhaka Cantonment. | | | |
| | - Receiving Tender Document | Tender Selling & Information Centre at GE (Army) Central Dhaka | | | |
| | - Opening Tender Document | Tender Selling & Information Centre at GE (Army) Central Dhaka | | | |
| 14. | Eligibility of Tenderer | a. MES enlisted contractors Class 'C' & 'D' for lot no. 15(a). b. On receipt of DGFI clearance with others Department (equivalent classes) contractors may also apply for tender. c. Contractors having experience in similar works with enlistment in other Govt., Semi-Government & Autonomous Organization may also apply. d. Having experience of similar work mentioned in Lot No 15(a) amounting Tk. 35,70,000.00 in a single tender during last 05 (Five) years. | | | |
| 15. | Brief Description of Works | Location | Price of Tender Document (Non Refundable) | Tender Security in the form of Bank Draft/ Pay order in favour of AHQ, E in C's Branch, Works Directorate, Dhaka Cantt. (Taka) | Completion Time in weeks/ Months |
| Lot No | Identification of Lot | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| a. | Manufacture & Supply of Furniture for Development of Garrison Engineer's Office & Residential area (GP-03). | Project site & GE (Army) Chattogram, Ramu, Jashore & GE (Navy) Khulna | 2000.00 | 1,50,000.00 | 04 (Four) Months |
| 16. | Name of Official Inviting Tender | Director of Works | | | |
| 17. | Designation of Official Inviting Tender | Director of Works | | | |
| 18. | Address of Official Inviting Tender | Army Headquarters, E in C's Branch, Works Directorate, Dhaka Cantonment. Web address : www.army.mil.bd | | | |
| 19. | Contact details of Official Inviting Tender | Tel No. 9832870 | Fax No. 9832882 | e-mail- wksdte@army.mil.bd | |
| 20. | The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject all tenders | | | | |

XEN E/M
For Director of Works
Works Directorate
Engineer in Chief's Branch
Dhaka Cantonment
Tel: Mili: 8711111 Ext: 2886
Civil: 9832886

GD-430



Monirul Haque

Ramadan overlap with fair hits already declining book sales

Says Monirul Haque, owner of leading publisher Anannya Prokashoni

DIPAN NANDY

Bangladesh's publishing sector is navigating one of its most difficult periods in recent memory, as declining sales, reduced book production, and limited institutional support continue to weigh on it. Against this backdrop, the Amar Ekushey Book Fair, the industry's most important annual event, began on February 26 under a cloud of uncertainty amid an unusual mixture of circumstances.

Speaking to The Daily Star in an exclusive interview recently, Monirul Haque, owner of Anannya Prokashoni and former executive director of the Academic and Creative Publishers Association of Bangladesh, did not try to sugarcoat it.

This year's fair, he said, does not look promising. It started later than usual, toward the end of February, just as the country was emerging from an election period. And then there is Ramadan.

"These factors have disrupted the usual rhythm and preparation," he said.

The disruption was visible even at the opening, with many publishers not being able to finish constructing their stalls by inauguration day. "Overall, the fair began in a somewhat unprepared state, which may affect both participation and visitor turnout."

The timing poses a particular commercial challenge. About 95 percent of the country's population is Muslim. Most observe the Ramadan fast. The late afternoon hours, traditionally the fair's busiest window, when visitors pour in between 4pm and 5pm, now collapse into the rush to get home before iftar. Evening attendance, too, is curtailed by tarawih prayers.

"Sales are expected to drop," Haque noted.

With the next two editions of the fair likely to coincide with Ramadan and Eid as well, he believes the only workable solution is long-term planning. "There could be efforts to adjust the fair schedule, perhaps starting earlier in February, so that at least part of it can be held before Ramadan. That would help mitigate the impact."

Apart from the troubling timing of the fair, the industry is faced with deeper problems.

"The creative publishing sector is under significant strain," Haque said. Where major publishers once sold books



A young visitor browses through books yesterday at the Amar Ekushey Book Fair, taking place on the Bangla Academy premises and at Suhrawardy Udyan in Dhaka.

PHOTO: MEHEDI HASAN

worth Tk 60 to 80 lakh in a single fair season, those figures are now a memory.

"Fewer books are being published now, and we are also seeing a decline in the emergence of new writers," he noted.

On top of that, the government's book procurement, a reliable source of revenue, has reduced considerably. Apart from limited purchases by institutions like the National Book Centre, there is little institutional support.

"All these factors have led to a sharp drop in overall turnover. The industry is clearly under pressure, although there is still hope that the situation will improve in the future," said Haque.

The Anannya Prokashoni owner, however, observed that there is one small silver lining. Unlike previous years, the prices of paper, ink, and other materials have remained stable ahead of this fair, likely because "fewer books are being published this year, which has reduced demand pressure."

Replying to a question on the accuracy of the data that Bangla

Academy releases on fair-period sales, he said, "The figures are generally close to reality, though not entirely precise." They offer a useful overall picture even if their practical impact is limited.

"Publishers try to report their sales as accurately as possible. While these statistics may not be highly impactful in practical terms, they still offer a useful overall picture of the fair's performance," he added.

On the question of why book sales have stagnated even as publication numbers have grown, Haque pointed to a structural problem: the reading culture itself needs to be cultivated, and that is not something a book fair alone can accomplish.

It begins in schools and families, where reading habits must be nurtured early, he said. "Libraries need to become more inviting and accessible, and there should be more engagement between writers and readers through events and discussions."

Equally important is the availability of quality content. "If readers find books that truly resonate with them, they

will return. Building a reading society is not a short-term project; it requires consistent cultural investment."

The challenges facing Bangladeshi publishing do not stop at the country's borders. According to Haque, breaking into international markets, especially with government support, is a goal that remains largely out of reach for most publishers. "It would significantly boost the visibility of our books."

"At present, individual publishers often lack the financial capacity to attend such events regularly. While Bangladeshi publishers do participate in fairs abroad, such as Bengali book fairs in New York, those are primarily attended by expatriate Bangladeshis. Foreign readers rarely attend these events, which limits global exposure," he said.

To expand internationally, Haque argued, publishers need stronger institutional backing, particularly from the government and organisations like the National Book Centre. "Only then can Bangladeshi literature find a wider global audience."

Finding the right exchange rate balance

MAMUN RASHID

It is a very tough exercise for our central bank to arrive at an optimal exchange rate and interest rate and, more importantly, ensure adequate liquidity in the market for credit creation without denting market discipline. Exporters and non-resident remitters want a higher exchange rate to channel their earnings into the country. An entrepreneur setting up a manufacturing plant or expanding a production base wants the import cost of machinery and raw materials to remain competitive.

Bangladesh policy makers, until recently, could not demonstrate strong skills in managing any one of these optimally. Not all blemishes can be laid at their door, yet they remained under pressure from politicians in power or specific business lobbies to keep the dollar price and even interest rates lower while peer countries moved in the opposite direction. While the real effective exchange rate warranted depreciation of the taka, it was held at Tk 84 to Tk 85 for a prolonged period. As prices crept upward, largely due to external factors, authorities chose to keep bank interest rates within 6 to 9 percent, offering extraordinary benefit to large borrowers at the expense of small savers.

The previous political government towards its final phase, as well as the interim administration, continued to keep interest rates high following prescriptions from certain development partners, without sufficient ground-level validation of the claim that high interest rates effectively tame inflation. As a consequence, small and medium enterprises and new entrepreneurs were deprived of liquidity support.

I recently asked several treasury dealers what the appropriate USD-taka rate and interest rate should be if we are to improve liquidity in the market.

Most argued that to make imports of capital machinery, industrial raw materials and essential commodities competitive, while also

mobilising remittances and improving liquidity, a balance between demand and supply is essential. In their view, the exchange rate should settle around Tk 115 in the coming weeks.

They pointed to the real effective exchange rate falling below Tk 110 in recent months. When asked about a desirable lending rate, their response was that it should hover around 12 to 14 percent, but not exceed that level. Their

recommendation was also informed by recent treasury bill and bond auction rates.

The Bangladesh Bank has purchased roughly \$6 billion in recent months, injecting slightly less than Tk 750 billion into the market. Remittances are averaging around \$30 billion on a run-rate basis. National reserves have risen to \$35 billion, with net reserves just below \$30 billion. Even so, market liquidity remains below optimal levels, largely due to rising bad loans and a significant volume of currency remaining outside formal accounting and circulation.

I agree with treasury heads that with a visible reduction in the real effective exchange rate, increased inward remittances and potential export growth, the taka may be allowed to appreciate slightly against the US dollar. At the same time, space should be created for small and medium enterprises by easing interest rates. Strong banks have already reduced deposit rates by nearly 2 percent over the past six to nine months. Lending rates should follow.

Our new prime minister, like his late mother, has consistently focused on the investment, employment creation and poverty reduction mantra during pre-election campaigns. If we are to turn that promise into reality, it is time to revisit both interest rate and exchange rate policies and, crucially, ensure that classified loans and unremitted export proceeds return to the national coffers.

Bangladesh can no longer afford to sustain rising bad loans and illicit capital transfers at such a high cost to its poverty reduction journey. More funds must return to the banking system so that they can be channelled into the productive streams of the economy.

Mamun Rashid is an economic analyst and chairman at Financial Excellence Ltd

OpenAI raises \$110b in record funding round

AFP, San Francisco

OpenAI announced Friday a massive \$110 billion funding round valuing the ChatGPT maker at \$730 billion, with SoftBank, Nvidia and Amazon each making multi-billion-dollar commitments as the artificial intelligence company races to meet surging global demand.

The investment round — one of the largest in Silicon Valley history — includes \$30 billion from Japanese conglomerate SoftBank, \$30 billion from chip giant Nvidia, and up to \$50 billion from Amazon, with additional investors expected to join as the round progresses.

Alongside the capital injection, OpenAI announced strategic partnerships with both Amazon, the world's biggest cloud company through its AWS division, and Nvidia, whose AI chips remain unparalleled in their capacity for AI training.

"SoftBank, Nvidia, and Amazon are long-term partners who share our ambition to turn real scientific progress into systems that deliver meaningful benefits for people at global scale," OpenAI said in a statement.

The eye-watering level of funding reflects the soaring costs of computing power and comes amid lingering questions about whether OpenAI and other AI companies can generate sufficient revenue to cover those costs.

The Amazon investment will begin with \$15 billion, followed by another \$35 billion in the coming months when certain conditions are met, the companies said.

According to reports, these include OpenAI going public or achieving artificial general intelligence, a sometimes ill-defined standard of AI capability that more closely matches human-level ability.

India logs 7.8% growth in Oct-Dec 2025



Customers buy fruits and vegetables at an open air evening market in Ahmedabad, India.

PHOTO: REUTERS/FILE

AFP, Mumbai

India's economy grew at a faster pace than expected in the last quarter of 2025 driven by solid consumer spending, data showed Friday, using a new framework that calculates economic output more accurately.

Gross domestic product rose 7.8 percent in the October-to-December quarter from the same period a year earlier, according to data from the statistics ministry.

While growth slipped from the 8.4 percent recorded in the previous quarter, it edged past market expectations of 7.6 percent. Aditi Nayar of ratings agency ICRA said the GDP growth number was "healthier than what we had expected".

"The moderation was expectedly driven by the agriculture and the non-manufacturing industrial sectors," she said in a note.

Friday's reading re-affirmed India as the world's fastest-growing major economy and is a shot in the arm for policymakers who have struggled with steep US tariffs, a falling rupee and muted consumption for most of 2025.

Last year, the government claimed India had surpassed Japan to become the world's fourth-largest economy.

However, the data for 2025 shows India's nominal GDP in dollar terms was still under the \$4 trillion mark compared to Japan's \$4.4 trillion — indicating that while it was close, the crossover has yet to happen.

Based on current numbers, India will cross the \$4 trillion mark comfortably in 2026-27, India's chief economic advisor V. Anantha Nageswaran said.

READ MORE ON B2

How will US strikes on Iran affect oil markets?

AFP, London

The US strikes against Iran could severely disrupt the global supply of crude oil and send prices soaring to levels not seen in years.

AFP looks at the risks.

MAJOR PRODUCER

Iran remains just inside the world's top 10 oil producers even though its output has fallen sharply since the 1970s, hit in particular by rounds of US sanctions.

"In 1974, Iran was the third-biggest producer in the world after the US and Saudi Arabia, and ahead of Russia, producing some six million barrels per day," Arne Rasmussen, chief analyst at Global Risk Management, told AFP.

Today, Iran produces about 3.1 million barrels per day, according to the oil-producing cartel OPEC, of which Iran is a member.

This remains a significant amount, and the Islamic republic is believed to hold the world's third-largest crude reserves, cementing its strategic importance.

Additionally, Iran's oil industry is in far better shape than that of Venezuela, another country hit by years of US sanctions.

STRAIT OF HORMUZ

The main risk to the oil market remains a blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, which connects the Gulf to the Gulf of Oman and which Iran has frequently threatened to paralyse.

This waterway is by far the main shipping route connecting the wealthy oil-producing countries of the Middle East to the rest of the world. Approximately 20 million barrels of crude oil passed through it daily in 2024, equivalent to nearly 20 percent of global liquid oil consumption, according to the US Energy Information Administration (EIA).

The strait is particularly vulnerable owing to its narrow width, around 50 kilometres (30 miles), and its shallow depth, which does not exceed 60 metres (200 feet).

"Even a doubt about security in the Strait would prompt many vessels, for insurance reasons, to face difficulties transiting, as premiums would rise sharply," said Rasmussen.

According to Saxo Bank analyst Ole Hansen, "only Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates possess meaningful bypass infrastructure".

The route could transport a maximum of 2.6 million barrels daily, noted the EIA.

HIGHLY PROFITABLE OIL

Iranian crude is relatively easy and cheap to extract, with production costs as little as \$10 per barrel, making it particularly profitable, Rasmussen said.

Only Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates enjoy similarly low production costs.

By comparison, major Western producers like Canada and the United States typically face costs of \$40 to \$60 per barrel.

With such low costs, Iran gains disproportionately from high global prices, a crucial factor for an economy heavily reliant on oil revenues.

US sanctions imposed since the 1979 Islamic Revolution have left Iran with few export options — especially after Trump revived a "maximum pressure" policy on Tehran upon his return to the White House.

Last year, Washington targeted Chinese "teapot" refineries, which operate independently of state-owned oil companies, accusing them of buying Iranian crude.



Tankers are seen at the Khor Fakkan Container Terminal, one of the major container ports in the Sharjah Emirate along the Strait of Hormuz, a waterway through which one-fifth of global oil output passes.

PHOTO: AFP/FILE