

Novoair offers interest-free EMI for tickets

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Private airline Novoair has announced a zero-interest equated monthly instalment (EMI) facility for its passengers, payable in six instalments with the airline's partner banks.

This offer is available with return fares, where the minimum EMI is Tk 1,567 per month. In case of one-way tickets, the minimum price should be Tk 5,000 to avail this facility without any hidden fees or charges, according to a press release issued yesterday.

Novoair is also offering a two-night travel package to Cox's Bazar with a minimum monthly instalment of Tk 1,818. This package includes return air tickets with all taxes, hotel accommodation, airport transfers, and Sehri or Iftar facilities.

A minimum of two persons must purchase the package to avail the offer.

"We hope that this instalment facility will make travelling affordable and easier, especially for family travellers," said Sohaib Majid, director (sales and marketing) of Novoair.

He added that the initiative aims to relieve passengers of immediate financial pressure.

The EMI offer is available at all Novoair sales offices. Currently, the carrier operates daily flights from Dhaka to Chattogram, Cox's Bazar, Sylhet, and Saidpur.

India opens first chip assembly facility

AFP, New Delhi

India inaugurated its first semiconductor assembly and test facility on Saturday, a milestone in the government's push to reduce dependence on foreign chipmakers and stake a claim in a sector dominated by China.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi opened US firm Micron Technology's Semiconductor Assembly, Test and Packaging unit in his home state of Gujarat, hailing the "dawn of a new era" for India's technology ambitions.

"When young Indians look back in the future, they will see this decade as the turning point in our tech future," Modi told the event, which was broadcast on his official YouTube channel.

The plant will convert advanced semiconductor wafers from Micron's global network into finished memory and storage products.



Shyampur Sugar Mills, established in 1965, has remained closed since March 2020. The mill's stocks started rising recently despite years of inactivity. This photo was taken on February 26.

PHOTO: DILIP ROY

Shut since 2020, yet Shyampur Sugar Mills' shares soar

Stocks rose amid rumours that manipulators were preparing to target the share

DILIP ROY

Shyampur Sugar Mills produced sugar for the last time six years ago. Although the facility shut down a month later, its stock suddenly started rising recently, becoming the 39th highest-value share on the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE).

The sugar mill's stock surged around 40 percent in the last three months, DSE data showed.

The last sugar production at the mill took place on February 15, 2020, amounting to 44,527 tonnes. Financial losses shut it down a month later. In the fiscal year (FY) 2024-25, the mill's net loss was Tk 25 crore while its accumulated loss stood at Tk 666 crore.

At the time of closure, around 700 officers and employees were working at the mill. Currently, only 63 officers and employees remain, among whom 36 are local residents who were appointed on a contractual basis as security personnel.

Despite the dire situation of the sugar mill, its stock rose mainly due to a rumour that manipulators are going to play with the stock, according to a market analyst.

Following such rumours, the stock sometimes surges and later falls again. As the number of shares for this mill is low, manipulators usually target this stock, he added.

Established in 1965, Shyampur Sugar Mills spans 111 acres. Since its closure, more than a hundred tractors, various vehicles and equipment have been lying unused and

neglected inside the premises. Many of these have become damaged. Some functional equipment has been transferred to other operating sugar mills in the country.

The Shyampur Sugar Mills is practically the only government industrial establishment in the Rangpur region. Its closure has had a negative impact on the economy of Shyampur and the surrounding areas under Rangpur Sadar upazila, locals say.

When the mill was operational, many of

In the fiscal year 2024-25, the mill's net loss was Tk 25 crore while its accumulated loss stood at Tk 666 crore

the mill staff and their families lived there, generating income for the locals. Businesses, transportation services and various service activities developed around the mill.

According to mill sources, Shyampur Sugar Mills produced an average of about 80,000 tonnes of sugar annually. To produce this quantity of sugar, around 13.4 lakh tonnes of sugarcane were required.

With an average production of 30 to 35 tonnes of sugarcane per acre of land, sugarcane was cultivated on about 40,000 to 42,000 acres of land. Nearly 40,000 farmers were directly involved in sugarcane cultivation.

The mill authorities spent around Tk 900 crore annually for sugarcane procurement and incentives for farmers.

In addition, more than Tk 35 crore flowed into the local economy annually in the form of salaries, allowances and other benefits for officers and employees.

After the closure, much of that economic activity disappeared. Business activities centring on the sugar mill have declined, and many small traders have been forced to change professions.

"Shyampur Sugar Mills was closely linked with the economy of this region," said Mosharraf Hossain, managing director of the mill. "Local people have long been demanding the reopening of the mill. However, the government has not yet made a decision."

Regarding the mill's closure six years ago, Hossain said, "Most sugar mills in the country are running at a loss. To make them profitable, diversified activities such as organic fertiliser production and cold storage facilities must be introduced alongside sugar production."

Local farmer Harkanta Barman used to cultivate sugarcane on two acres of land and supplied it to the mill. After the mill closed down, he switched to cultivating maize and seasonal vegetables.

"I earned good money by selling sugarcane to the mill. I also received incentives for sugarcane cultivation," he said, adding that he does not make as much profit anymore.

"The government shut down the mill, citing losses, but our economy is linked to this mill. We have suffered financially because of its closure."

When do nations fail?

ASHIKUR RAHMAN

Nations do not fail overnight. Nor do they fail because of fate, geography, or some imagined civilizational curse. They fail slowly; when the institutions meant to safeguard the public interest are captured, hollowed out, and repurposed to serve the ambitions of a narrow elite.

Political independence or periodic economic growth alone does not guarantee success. The real test of a nation's resilience lies in its ability to modernise both politically and economically; to build institutions that are accountable, adaptive, and anchored in merit rather than patronage. Where modernisation stalls, decline begins.

Historically, countries that stagnate share a similar condition. Institutions designed to regulate markets, protect property rights, and ensure justice gradually become tools of political opportunism. Regulators are compromised. Financial systems are manipulated. Public procurement becomes opaque. Civil service is politicised. The line between state and oligarchy blurs.

Economic instability and deprivation are rarely accidents. They are not products of national destiny, but manifestations of political failures that allow institutions to be appropriated by kleptocratic networks.

The consequences are predictable. Investment declines because rules are uncertain. Honest entrepreneurs are crowded out by politically connected actors. Public banks become vehicles for insider lending. Non-performing loans rise. Fiscal space shrinks. Inflation accelerates. Citizens lose trust both in government and the fairness of the economic system.

The tragedy of many African states illustrates this dynamic vividly. The problem was not an absence of natural resources. Many were richly endowed. The deeper issue was institutional capture. Entrenched elites plundered national wealth, transferred assets abroad, and secured safe exits in foreign jurisdictions. What remained behind were weakened institutions, fragile currencies, and fractured social contracts.

When institutions are hollowed out, the state loses its ability to perform its most basic functions: providing public goods, enforcing contracts, managing macroeconomic stability, and ensuring justice. Governance becomes reactive rather than strategic. Crises multiply. Reform windows close. Citizens disengage or radicalise. No country is immune to this trajectory.

Bangladesh stands at a consequential juncture. It has demonstrated extraordinary resilience in the past; lifting millions out of poverty, expanding exports, building social protection systems, and sustaining growth. But resilience should not be mistaken for invulnerability.

Recent years have exposed how quickly institutional weaknesses can compound into macroeconomic stress. When financial oversight is compromised, banking crises emerge. When accountability mechanisms weaken, corruption becomes systemic rather than episodic. When public discourse narrows and dissent is discouraged, policy mistakes go uncorrected for too long. The warning signs are visible in stressed financial institutions, declining private investment, capital flight, and public frustration.

Bangladesh can grow again. Right now, the more pressing question is whether it can embed meritocracy, accountability, and rule-based governance deeply enough within its political and economic architecture to prevent future capture.

Modernisation is not just about infrastructure or GDP expansion. It is about strengthening regulatory autonomy, ensuring central bank independence, professionalising civil service, protecting judicial integrity, and building competitive markets free from oligarchic privilege. It is about creating a system where performance is rewarded, corruption is punished, and institutions outlast individuals.

No nation consciously sets out to become a failed state. Failure is incremental. The path away from failure, however, is equally incremental; built through consistent reform, civic vigilance, and political courage. If we fail to internalise this lesson, if we continue to tolerate institutional capture in exchange for short-term political convenience, then the responsibility will not lie in our stars. It will lie in our choices.

The question is stark but necessary: do we truly want to risk becoming another cautionary tale? Or are we prepared to confront institutional decay before it becomes irreversible? The answer will define not just our economic future, but the very character of our republic.

The author is the principal economist at Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh.



Iran war: Oil market in biggest crisis in decades

REUTERS, London

Global energy markets face one of their gravest shocks in decades as joint US and Israeli strikes on Iran and Tehran's retaliatory missile attacks across the Gulf disrupt oil exports from the world's most important producing region.

The scale of the disruption will likely be determined by the duration of the conflict, but for now the threat and the uncertainty are already enough to severely impact flows from the region that accounts for 20 percent of global oil supplies.

Barring a swift resolution, oil prices will likely see steep increases when trading opens on Monday morning. Benchmark Brent crude oil prices rose in recent weeks to around \$70 a barrel, their highest since August 2025 as investors braced for military confrontation in the Middle East.

The United States and Israel carried out military strikes on Iran on Saturday, targeting senior leaders and plunging the Middle East into a widening conflict. US President Donald Trump said the attacks would eliminate a security threat to the United States and give Iranians an opportunity to topple their rulers.

For now, there is no confirmed damage to oil and gas infrastructure from retaliatory Iranian strikes.

Explosions were reported in the United

Arab Emirates and Kuwait, two major oil exporters. Meanwhile, Qatar, the world's second-largest exporter of liquefied natural gas, said it intercepted missiles aimed at the country.

Blasts were also heard in Bahrain and near Iran's Kharg Island, the terminal through which about 90 percent of its crude exports normally flow, although shipping data suggests Tehran had transferred most of the oil stored there onto tankers in recent days.

Crucially, there have so far been no reports of disruptions to shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow waterway between Iran and Oman that handles nearly 20 million barrels per day of crude oil and refined products.

CAUTION MEANS DISRUPTION

But the absence of physical damage may not matter much.

The risk that tankers could be stranded inside the Gulf, north of Hormuz, or that vessels could be targeted, is already enough to force producers, traders and shippers to rethink movements of oil and LNG. Reuters has reported that some oil majors and trading houses have suspended shipments through the strait for several days.

That caution is unlikely to ease until there is far greater confidence in the safety of the region's sea lanes.

Tanker freight rates, which had already



This file photo shows the British-flagged oil tanker Stena Impero as it leaves Bandar Abbas port in southern Iran. Barring a swift resolution, oil prices will likely see steep increases when trading opens on Monday morning.

PHOTO: AFP/FILE

been climbing as tensions escalated, are set to rise further. Benchmark rates for very large crude carriers from the Middle East to China have more than tripled since the start of the year, reflecting both heightened risk and the shrinking pool of willing vessels.

The key questions now are whether energy infrastructure will be directly targeted and how quickly the US military can secure shipping routes across the Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz.

It is worth noting that the Strait of Hormuz has never been fully blocked.

While Iran is unlikely to sustain a prolonged blockade, it has the capability to disrupt traffic temporarily. The US Navy would almost certainly respond swiftly, but even short-lived attacks or mine-laying operations could have outsized effects on prices and supply.

Such tactics would not be unprecedented. During the 1980s Iran-Iraq war, Iran

attacked commercial shipping and US naval vessels, prompting President Ronald Reagan to deploy US forces to escort tankers in Operation Earnest Will. More recently, in late 2007 and early 2008, there were repeated confrontations between Iranian and US naval forces. And in April 2023, Iran's navy seized the Advantage Sweet crude tanker, chartered by Chevron, in the Gulf of Oman. The vessel was released more than a year later.

GLOBAL SUPPLY CUSHION

The global oil market is relatively well supplied today, after production from the United States, Brazil, Canada and other countries rose in recent years.

Saudi Arabia, the world's top oil exporter, has also not sat idle in the face of the risk to supply. In recent days the kingdom increased crude shipments, which are set to exceed 7 million barrels per day in February, the highest since April 2023, according to shipping analytics firm Kpler.

Opec+, which comprises the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies like Russia, agreed on an output increase during a meeting on Sunday.

Of course, disruptions to export routes from the Middle East could negate much of the production increases from regional producers, though Saudi and the UAE have some alternative export routes.