

US trade deal undermines sovereignty

Say economists

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The reciprocal trade deal signed by the interim government with the United States limits Bangladesh's ability to make independent decisions, economist Mustafizur Rahman said yesterday.

He made the remarks at a discussion titled "Unfair Trade Deal with the United States: A Threat to Bangladesh's Economy, Security, and Sovereignty", organised by the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) at the Dhaka Reporters Unity.

Rahman, a distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), said the deal increases tariffs from 15 percent to 34 percent and forces Bangladesh to buy large quantities of US products, including defence equipment and Boeing planes, according to a press release.

"This deal limits our ability to make independent decisions and

threatens our economy, security, and sovereignty," he said.

MM Akash, a former professor of economics at Dhaka University, said, "This agreement was rushed and lacks transparency. Only a few people were involved, and it clearly favours US interests over Bangladesh."

CPB President Sazzad Jahir Chandon called the deal a serious threat to the country, saying, "It must be cancelled immediately, and those responsible must face punishment."

CPB former general secretary Ruhin Hossain Prince said the deal essentially protects US interests and forces Bangladesh into a state of dependency.

"The government must make all agreements public, and the people must oppose any actions that serve foreign powers over national interests," he said.

CPB Dhaka North President Hasan Hafizur Rahman Sohel said those who signed the deal against the interests of Bangladesh must be held responsible.

Global fuel price hike won't hit Eid travel cost: minister

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Commerce Minister Khandaker Abdul Muktadir has said that increased global fuel prices will not affect transport costs in Bangladesh or impact travel to and from home during Eid-ul-Fitr celebrations in the country.

There is also no possibility of a spike in the prices of essential commodities, said Muktadir, who is also the minister for industries, textiles, and jute.

"However, if the war is prolonged, the global economy may suffer to some extent. We are in favour of peace. I hope the war will end soon and peace will be established in the world," he said, responding to questions from journalists at an Iftar and Eid gift distribution ceremony for working-class families in Sylhet city yesterday.

He added that the government has made all necessary preparations to ensure that ordinary people do not face any hardship.

Gold prices slip

REUTERS

Gold prices slipped on Friday and were on track for a second consecutive weekly decline, pressured by a stronger dollar and inflation worries driven by the Iran war, which weighed on rate-cut expectations.

Spot gold fell 0.5 percent to \$5,052.15 per ounce, by 1:44 p.m. ET (1744 GMT), and was down over 2 percent for the week so far.

US gold futures for April delivery settled 1.3 percent lower at \$5,061.70.

What US trade probes mean

FROM PAGE B1 economies like Bangladesh have built industrial strength in ways that distort competition.

From Bangladesh's perspective, this framing is debatable. Much of the country's export growth has been rooted not in heavy industrial subsidies but in labour-intensive production, private entrepreneurship, and participation in global value chains. Export incentives do exist, and they are common among developing economies seeking to diversify production. But they are hardly unique to Bangladesh.

The risk, however, lies less in the validity of the accusation and more in the political momentum behind it. If the investigation ultimately leads to punitive tariffs or other trade restrictions, Bangladesh's largest export market could become less predictable.

That possibility alone introduces uncertainty into a sector that employs millions and remains central to the country's industrial transformation.

The forced labour investigation introduces a different but equally

sensitive dimension. Bangladesh's garment industry has already undergone significant reforms since the Rana Plaza tragedy in 2013. Workplace safety standards have improved, monitoring mechanisms have strengthened, and global buyers have imposed stricter compliance requirements.

Still, labour governance remains uneven. Informality persists in segments of supply chains, and labour rights enforcement often struggles with institutional capacity constraints. The US investigation therefore touches on a broader debate about labour standards in global production networks.

From a policy standpoint, Bangladesh faces a delicate balancing act. On the one hand, it must resist narratives that simplistically portray its development model as exploitative or unfair. On the other hand, the investigations highlight the urgency of strengthening domestic institutions. Labour inspections, supply-chain transparency, and compliance monitoring must continue to improve—not only to satisfy foreign scrutiny but also to protect

workers and sustain long-term competitiveness.

More broadly, these developments illustrate a deeper shift in global trade politics. The era when export success alone guaranteed market access is fading. Trade is increasingly intertwined with geopolitical rivalry, industrial policy, and social standards. For Bangladesh, which is preparing to graduate from least developed country status, this changing landscape demands a strategic response. Diversifying export markets, moving up the value chain, and building stronger regulatory institutions will become essential.

In that sense, the US investigations should be viewed not merely as threats but also as warning signals. They remind Bangladesh that the next phase of its development cannot rely solely on cost advantages and scale. Competitiveness in the future will depend increasingly on credibility, standards, and institutional strength.

The writer is a professor of economics at the University of Dhaka and executive director of Sanem

Shipping costs spiral

FROM PAGE B1 \$3,000 per 40-foot container, and \$4,000 for refrigerated containers for cargo linked to several Gulf countries.

The company also announced an emergency fuel surcharge of \$75 to \$180 starting March 16 due to rising bunker costs – the price of fuel for ships.

CMA CGM said sharply higher fuel prices, caused by ongoing geopolitical tensions in the Middle East, have pushed up bunker costs across all regions, raising overall ocean transport costs.

Hapag-Lloyd has implemented a war risk surcharge of \$1,500 per 20-foot container for standard containers and \$3,000 per refrigerated container for cargo to and from the Upper Gulf, Arabian Gulf, and Persian Gulf.

The company has also introduced an emergency fuel surcharge of \$70 to \$225 on all trade routes, effective from March 23.

A senior executive at a local office of a foreign shipping company said the new rates were introduced to cover additional operating costs and risks.

IMPACT ON BANGLADESH EXPORTS

Bangladesh exports a wide range of products to the Middle East, including spices, mustard oil, and processed foods such as beverages, biscuits, puffed rice, chanchur, noodles, and other snacks.

Bangladeshi diasporas in those countries are the main consumers of those items. According to data from the Export Promotion

Bureau (EPB), processed food exports to the Middle East are valued at \$40-\$45 million annually.

Shipping lines say that around 3,000 TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent units) of export containers leave Bangladesh for Middle Eastern countries each month.

Since the war began, at least 1,000 TEUs have been stranded at private container depots in Chattogram, at Chattogram port, and at



transshipment ports such as Colombo, as well as on vessels in transit.

Pran EFL Group, which exports a wide range of food products to more than 70 countries, sends around 30 percent of its exports to the Middle East.

Kamruzzaman Kamal, marketing director of the company, said around 400 TEUs of the group's export containers are currently stranded on vessels and at transshipment ports.

"We will have to pay additional surcharges for these cargoes," Kamal told

The Daily Star yesterday.

He said that the company is negotiating with shipping lines to find alternative routes for the stranded shipments.

At present, cargo can only be shipped to the Saudi port of Jeddah, where freight rates have surged to \$6,300 per container from the previous \$2,700, he said.

Freight forwarders said shipping from Chattogram to Europe now costs about \$1,400 per 20-foot

container and \$2,000 per 40-foot container, with the new emergency fuel surcharge added on top. Freight rates on other shipping routes have also increased.

Rakibul Alam, director of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), said the freight rate for importing raw materials for the readymade garment sector from China to Chattogram has risen to \$2,000 per 40-foot container, up from \$1,500.

Bangladeshi

FROM PAGE B1 "The findings are particularly important as Bangladesh prepares to graduate from the least developed country (LDC) category," he added.

Currently, duty-free access to the EU helps exporters secure better prices. But once Bangladesh graduates, some of these trade preferences may gradually erode, he said.

"The industry will need to strengthen competitiveness by improving product quality, diversifying into higher-value apparel segments and enhancing technological capabilities," he noted.

Without such upgrades, he said exporters may face growing pressure on prices and margins in global markets, especially in destinations where Bangladesh lacks preferential trade access.

Abdur Rahim Khan, additional secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, said in the past 50 years, the country has failed to

develop alternative markets or product competition, and now needed export-driven investment

"If we graduate from LDC status without proper preparation and preferential market access, it will deal a major blow to both the country's economy and social structure," he added.

Doulot Akter Mala, president of the Economic Reporters Forum, added, "The biggest problem of our ready-made garments industry is that we have put all our eggs in one basket. Lack of diversification in products and markets makes us vulnerable whenever instability arises in the US or European markets."

Md Hafizur Rahman, adviser on trade policy and trade facilitation at the Trade Bank, said, "Bangladesh needs to move from being a low-cost or low-price brand to a high-price brand. This will increase pricing power and competitiveness in international markets."

Internet subscriber base shrinks

FROM PAGE B1 The figure slipped slightly to 11.50 crore in December, before falling further to 11.42 crore in January.

SIM OWNERSHIP CAP THE MAJOR FACTOR

In June 2025, the government formally capped personal SIM ownership to 10 from 15 as part of a broader push to improve transparency in telecom services,

curb criminal misuse of mobile connections and strengthen national security oversight.

Subscribers were initially given until October 30, 2025, to voluntarily deregister or transfer SIMs exceeding the new limit. The deadline was later extended to December 29, 2025.

Industry insiders say this process played a major role

in the overall decline.

Shahed Alam, chief corporate and regulatory affairs officer at Robi Axiata, said during the last quarter of 2025, the total number of active internet subscribers declined slightly.

Attributing the change to a reduction in the number of active SIM cards in the market, he said, "As SIM ownership is directly

related to mobile internet usage, a decrease in active SIMs naturally impacts the size of the internet subscriber base."

He listed several other factors contributing to this trend. "The current economic environment has prompted many consumers to reassess and optimise their spending," he said, causing a decline in the overall

number of active SIM cards compared with the previous quarter. Meanwhile, the number of fixed broadband users remained relatively stable throughout the period. Broadband subscribers stood at 1.46 crore between September and December, before increasing to 1.48 crore in January, reflecting a gradual expansion of fixed internet services.

the final week of Ramadan and anticipates overall sales will surpass last year's sales.

Retailers also noted that impulse buying and gift purchases remain a key component of Eid shopping. Handcrafted ornaments, leather bags, wall hangings and other decorative items are popular gift choices during the festive season.

Smaller boutique stores are also seeing positive demand, although sales vary by location. Lanthorn, a boutique at Aziz Super Market in the capital's Shahbagh, said sales have been below expectations, with its founder Ujjal Akash citing the area's association with political gatherings as a drag on footfall.

"Shahbagh has gained notoriety as a hub for political movements and processions, which is affecting our business," he said.

He, however, noted strong demand for panjabis and the market's draw for shoppers seeking distinctive designs. "In Aziz Super Market, every shop offers unique designs. That attracts a lot of buyers looking for something different."

Women's three-piece outfits and men's T-shirts have also recorded strong sales, he added.

Jewellery is one segment that has not shared in the broader uptick. Aminul Islam Sahin, owner of Shiraj Jewellers at New Market, said gold purchases, typically buoyant before Eid, have remained weak this season due to elevated prices.

"Earlier, we usually saw a rise in gold purchases before Eid, but that is not the case now. People are only buying if there is an urgent need," he said.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Office of the Divisional Forest Officer
Wildlife Management & Nature Conservation Division
Chattogram

**Project Name: Development & Expansion of the Dulahazara Safari Park
Cox's Bazar (2nd Phase) (2nd Revised) Project**

Memo No. 22.01.1500.122.29.002.2026.687 Date: 12/03/2026

e-Tender Notice

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

Tender ID & Package No.	Name of the package	Online notice publication date and time	Online tender last selling date and time	Online tender closing date and time
1242758 DSP/2025-2026/GD-01	Purchase of AC Minibus with SS Grill	15-March-2026 10:00	29-March-2026 17:00	30-March-2026 12:00

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

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GD-594

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Department of Fire Service & Civil Defence
38-46, Kazi Alauddin Road, Dhaka.

Memo No. 58.03.0000.017.07.019.26.3165 Date: 11/03/2026

Invitation For e-Tender Notice No: FS&CD (Foreign Procurement Section): 11/2025-2026

e-Tender is invited in the National e-Gp-system Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of goods as mentioned in the following table :

SL. No.	e-Tender ID No.	Name of the Equipment's & Quantity	e-Tender Publishing Date & Time	Last Selling Date & Time	Closing & Opening Date & Time
1.	1242932	Fire Rescue Tender Medium-11 Nos.	15.03.2026 at 09.00 AM	12.04.2026 at 12.00 PM	12.04.2026 at 15.00 PM

This is an online Tender where only e-Tenders will be accepted in the national e-Gp portal & no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-tender registration in the national e-Gp system portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required. For more details please contact help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

The fees for downloading the e-tender documents from the national e-Gp System Portal have to be deposited online through any registered bank branches.

Note :

(I) Quantity of equipment may be increased or decreased due to budget reductions and increases without showing any reason.
(II) The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject any or all e-Tenders without showing any reason at any time of the procuring process.
(III) Tender notice will also be published in FS&CD website: www.fireservice.gov.bd

Md. Shahid Atahar Hossain
Director (Admin & Finance)

GD-590