

# Star BUSINESS



## US trade deal boosts Wi-Fi but threatens revenue

Bangladesh also risks falling out of step with Asia-Pacific spectrum plans by opening the entire 6 GHz band for unlicensed use

MAHMUDUL HASAN

Bangladesh will open the entire 6 gigahertz (GHz) band for unlicensed use, allowing devices such as smartphones, laptops, routers, smart TVs and VR headsets to use this spectrum, according to the reciprocal trade deal with the United States.

With this additional spectrum allocated for Wi-Fi, Bangladesh will have more than enough capacity to support connected devices simultaneously, but it may come at the cost of mobile connectivity, on which the country's internet ecosystem heavily relies.

The deal also could cost the telecom regulator significant future revenue from spectrum auctions, officials at the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) said.

Besides, industry experts say that making both the lower and upper parts of the band licence-free could leave the country out of step with regional spectrum plans. This could lead to signal interference near borders and slower growth of mobile networks in the longer term.

In simple terms, think of the 6 GHz band as a long road. It starts at 5.925 GHz and ends at 7.125 GHz, giving a total width of 1,200 MHz.

This road is divided into two sections. The lower part, from 5.925 GHz to 6.425 GHz, spans about 500 MHz. It works like a public road, open to all. It is now mainly used for Wi-Fi, home internet and smart devices, and does not require a licence.

The upper part, from 6.425 GHz to 7.125 GHz, covers about 700 MHz. This section is more like a toll road. Companies must pay the government to use it, and it is usually reserved for mobile networks such as 5G.

Under the reciprocal trade deal, this "toll road" would also be opened up for free use. In effect, the entire band would become licence-free.

While that could improve internet speeds indoors and support a growing number of connected devices, it raises two key concerns.

First, most countries in the Asia-Pacific region plan to keep the upper portion for mobile services. If Bangladesh takes a different approach, signals using the same frequencies on either side of the border could interfere with each other.

Second, giving up the upper band means the telecom regulator would lose the option to sell that spectrum to mobile operators in future, potentially reducing a major source of revenue.

Telecom industry insiders say that US companies such as Amazon, Apple, Meta Platforms, and Google make devices, cloud services, streaming platforms, and smart-home products that rely heavily on Wi-Fi.

For them, more spectrum means better performance and sales for their products worldwide.

"Opening the upper 6 GHz spectrum band for licence exempt WLAN/RLAN use may stimulate connectivity and innovation, but it also reduces potential fiscal revenues from spectrum auctions while increasing regulatory demands related to interference management and enforcement," said MA Razzaque, chairman of Research and Policy Integration for Development (RAPID).

"The benefits of such spectrum liberalisation may accrue disproportionately to foreign technology firms and device manufacturers, given Bangladesh's

### BANGLADESH TO OPEN ENTIRE 6 GHZ BAND UNDER US TRADE DEAL

Total bandwidth: 5.925-7.125 GHz (1,200 MHz)

#### CURRENT DIVISION

Lower 6 GHz (5.925-6.425 GHz, 500 MHz):

Licence-free, supports Wi-Fi, home internet, IoT

Upper 6 GHz (6.425-7.125 GHz, 700 MHz):

Licensed, reserved for 5G mobile networks

TRADE DEAL CHANGE: Entire 6 GHz band to become licence-free

#### POSSIBLE IMPACT

- Faster Wi-Fi
- More modern devices
- Improved performance for cloud, streaming, and smart-home services

#### RISKS

- Misalignment with regional spectrum plans, cross-border interference
- Loss of future government revenue from spectrum auctions

still evolving digital infrastructure, regulatory capacity, and limited domestic high-value technology production," he added.

#### RISK OF FALLING OUT OF STEP WITH THE REGION

Bangladesh, one of the world's most densely populated countries with more than 180 million people, faces rapidly rising demand for mobile broadband.

Projections suggest around 2,000 MHz of spectrum will be needed for International Mobile Telecommunications (IMT) services, yet mid-band availability remains limited.

To prepare, the government has already included the upper portion of the 6 GHz band in its national frequency allocation plan as a licensed band for mobile networks.

Dhaka has also submitted its position to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), backing regional harmonisation of the upper 6 GHz band for licensed mobile use.

Several countries, including India, China, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Laos and Cambodia, are pursuing similar plans.

Telecom experts say a sudden shift could disrupt that alignment and increase the risk of interference.

Anamika Bhakta, senior director at Robi Axiata, told The Daily Star that harmonisation within a region is crucial. It shapes the device ecosystem and determines how quickly a band matures. A lack of alignment, she said, can create interference issues in border areas.

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## Section 301: A new trade test from Washington

MG QUIBRIA

The new US investigations do not, in themselves, raise tariffs, but they are a reminder that Dhaka remains vulnerable to legal and political trade pressure despite the recent bilateral agreement.

Just when Dhaka might have hoped that its trade tensions with Washington were entering a more manageable phase, the United States has opened a new line of pressure.

### ANALYSIS

On March 11, the Office of the US Trade Representative (USTR) launched Section 301 investigations into 16 countries for alleged "structural excess capacity and production in manufacturing sectors". Bangladesh was on the list. The following day, the USTR opened a second round of investigations — covering 60 economies — into failures to take sufficient action to prohibit the importation of goods produced with forced labour. Bangladesh appeared there too.

The timing is no accident. On February 20, in *Learning Resources v. Trump*, the US Supreme Court ruled that the president's use of the emergency powers law IEEPA to impose sweeping tariffs was unlawful. But the decision did not end American tariff activism; it merely redirected it toward statutory channels with firmer legal foundations. The US government then turned to Section 122 — used for balance-of-payments problems — as a temporary replacement. Yet Section 122 is a limited device: it allows tariffs of up to 15 percent for only 150 days.

Section 301, by contrast, was waiting in the wings as the more durable instrument. US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent has said that even after the Supreme Court reduced the president's power to impose tariffs under IEEPA, the United States could still raise nearly as much money from tariffs by using other laws.

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## BB removes a director from Islami Bank board

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh Bank (BB) has removed Md Abdul Jalil, independent director and executive committee chairman of Islami Bank Bangladesh, one of the largest shariah-based banks.

Officials of the BB, speaking on condition of anonymity, on Monday said multiple allegations had been submitted against Abdul Jalil and that he had been warned on several occasions.

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Arief Hossain Khan, executive director and spokesperson of BB, confirmed the removal but did not comment on the reason.

Jalil was appointed by the central bank on August 22, 2024, as an independent director to the reconstituted board of Islami Bank after the fall of the Awami League-led government on August 5 of the same year.

Jalil's appointment was part of the BB's bid to dissolve the previous S Alam-dominated board and form a new one comprising five independent directors.

Before removing Jalil, the new governor of BB held a meeting with the board of Islami Bank, raising questions about various aspects of the bank's operations, officials said.

After Jalil's removal, the BB appointed SM Abdul Hamid, an experienced banker and a chartered accountant, as the new independent director.

## Middle East tensions may slow remittance inflows: BB

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Remittance inflows could slow due to migration disruptions and economic uncertainty in the Middle East amid the US-Israel war on Iran, according to a Bangladesh Bank (BB) quarterly report on remittance published Monday.

The escalating war in the Gulf region has already pushed up the prices of oil, liquefied natural gas, fertiliser, and sulphur, as Iran effectively controls the Strait of Hormuz — through which one-fifth of global oil exports and nearly one-third of global fertiliser shipments pass.

The crisis has forced the cancellation of more than 600 Middle East-bound flights from Bangladesh, mostly affecting migrant workers.

Since fiscal year 2014-15, 8.6 million migrants have found jobs abroad, with Saudi Arabia employing 48 percent of them. Overall, Middle Eastern nations — including Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, the UAE, and Kuwait — accounted for 75 percent of all overseas employment, according to the Bangladesh Economic Review 2025.

The region contributed nearly half of the more than \$30 billion in remittance Bangladesh received in FY26.

The BB report for October-December said remittance earnings are expected to remain relatively resilient.

"However, smooth inflows of remittance would depend on easing geopolitical tensions. Despite high remittance inflows with a large stock of existing migrant workers, remittance growth could slow due to migration disruptions and economic uncertainty in host countries," it said.

"The magnitude of the impact will largely depend on the duration and geographic spread

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## 'Artificial shortage' pushes up edible oil prices

Retailers say; wholesalers blame supply constraints

SUKANTA HALDER and MOHAMMAD SUMAN

A sudden spike in edible oil prices was observed over the last week, which retailers claim was caused by immoral traders creating an artificial shortage, whereas wholesalers have pointed to the Gulf war situation influencing the global market and consumer behaviour.

The demand for soybean and palm oil in the country during Ramadan is 3 lakh tonnes, whereas importers have brought in 3.66 lakh tonnes in anticipation of the month, according to a Ministry of Commerce document.

Visiting several kitchen markets in Dhaka and Chattogram on Monday, correspondents found that edible oil is being sold above the maximum retail price.

Consumers are paying Tk 3 to Tk 10 more per litre for edible oil in the retail market, according to retailers in different parts of the country.

Five-litre bottles of soybean oil all but vanished from the market in some areas as Ramadan reached the mid-point. Some traders even limit the number of such bottles an individual can buy.

Abul Hashem, a trader at Moulvibazar, a wholesale hub for sugar and edible oil in the capital, said he has been receiving only a single carton of five-litre bottles of soybean oil, whereas the demand is for five cartons.

As a result of this scarcity, demand has shifted to loose soybean oil, raising its price

as well, he said.

As per Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) data, on Monday, loose soybean oil was sold at Tk 185 to Tk 193 per litre, up from Tk 175 to Tk 186 a week ago, a 4.71 percent rise.

Five-litre bottles of soybean oil were sold yesterday at Tk 950 to Tk 955, compared to Tk 920 to Tk 955 a week ago, marking a 1.60 percent increase.

Meanwhile, Super palm oil was sold at Tk 165 to Tk 170 per litre yesterday, up from Tk 162 to Tk 165 a week ago, marking an increase

of approximately 2.45 percent.

#### WHOLESALE TRADERS CITE GLOBAL INFLUENCE

Wholesale traders in Chattogram are blaming global uncertainties triggered by the US-Israel war on Iran for a rise in edible oil prices.

According to trading sources and delivery order traders, two weeks ago, palm oil traded at Tk 5,850 per maund, rising to Tk 5,900 to Tk 5,920 after the war began. It now sells at Tk 6,200 per maund.

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