

Star BUSINESS



Doreen Garments sues US buyer over \$678,000 unpaid dues

REFAYAT ULLAH MIRDHA

Apparel exporter Doreen Garments Ltd has been struggling to collect \$678,412 from US-based Zinntex LLC for a shipment delivered two years ago, prompting the supplier to file a lawsuit in an American court.

The exporter had shipped 96,576 pieces of denim trousers to Zinntex but has been unable to collect payment as the buyer has since stopped responding to payment requests, according to Tahzeeb Alam Siddique, a director at Doreen Garments.

Doreen Garments filed a case in an US court one year ago over the issue, he said. The shipment was the company's first and last order to Zinntex, which has no office in Bangladesh.

"We are hopeful that Zinntex will make the payment to us as our attorney in the US is confident about the sales and bank documents," Director of Doreen Garments Tahzeeb Alam Siddique told The Daily Star over the phone.

"We have to go to court even if it is expensive, as the amount is big for us," he added.

Several other Chattogram based garment manufacturers have also been defrauded by Zinntex, according to Siddique. "This is not a big brand in the US and it mainly sources denim garment items."

Meanwhile, on March 16, the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) sent a letter to members warning them against doing business with the company.

The association had earlier attempted to secure Doreen's payment from the US company but received no response.

BGMEA also requested information from members who have traded with Zinntex to assess the scope of non-payment, as the association lacks data on which factories have dealt with the buyer.

"We tried to get the payment from Zinntex but the US company defrauded the local company," said BGMEA President Mahmud Hasan Khan.

Khan said the trade body will meet with the US embassy in Dhaka after Eid to discuss the issue.

The association has identified similar payment defaults by buyers from Australia and India, as well as instances of local buying houses failing to pay suppliers, according to Khan.

BGMEA has asked buying houses to become associated members of the trade body as a condition for doing business with local manufacturers, he also said.



Most BGMEA factories clear Feb salaries, Eid bonuses

SAYS ITS PRESIDENT

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Almost all member factories of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) have paid February salaries and Eid bonuses, President of the trade body Mahmud Hasan Khan said yesterday.

At a press briefing in the capital, he said, "99.91 percent of factories have completed February salary payments, while two factories are still in the process of paying workers. No BGMEA-listed factory has any pending issues regarding February salaries."

"Similarly, 99.81 percent of factories have paid Eid bonuses, with four factories still disbursing payments. Moreover, 64.03 percent of factories have paid partial March salaries, even though this is not legally required," he added.

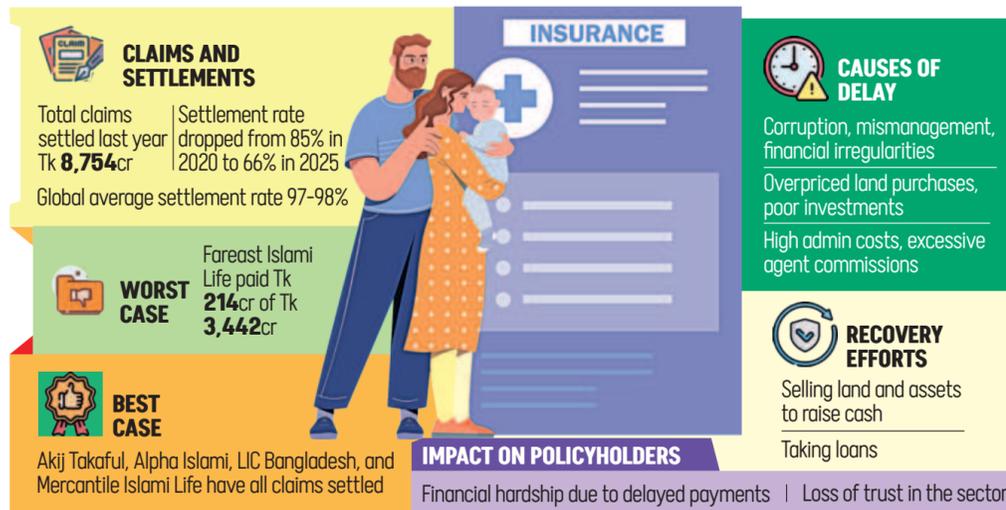
The association now has nearly 2,400 member factories.

"The Eid holiday started on March 17. Half of the factories announced their holidays on the first day, while the rest are expected to announce theirs by today or tomorrow (March 18 or 19)," he said.

Earlier, BB released Tk 2,500 crore from the export receipts fund, and the government provided Tk 1,500 crore in bank loans to factory owners to pay garment workers ahead of the Eid holidays.

Life insurers face mounting unpaid claims, now at 12 lakh

Amount of unsettled claims hits Tk 4,403 crore as irregularities, mismanagement and corruption undermine confidence



SUKANTA HALDER

Monjur Rahman took out a policy with Fareast Islami Life Insurance Company in 2012 to secure his financial future. When it matured in 2022 with a claim of Tk 11.19 lakh, he submitted all the required documents but has yet to receive any payment.

"When I contacted the company, I faced repeated delays and obstacles. Even when my father was hospitalised, I requested a partial payment to cover medical expenses, but I still did not receive any money," Rahman said.

Under the Insurance Act 2010, insurers are required to settle claims within 90 days of receiving all necessary documents.

Payments to life insurance policyholders continue to face heavy delays as the sector grapples with a deepening liquidity crisis. In 2023, around 10 lakh policyholders were waiting for payouts from 29 companies, with Tk 3,050 crore in unpaid claims. The situation has since deteriorated.

According to the latest data from the Insurance Development and Regulatory Authority (Idra), about 12

lakh policyholders remain unpaid, with 32 insurance companies struggling to clear dues and seven showing the lowest settlement rates. Unsettled claims have grown to Tk 4,403 crore till 2025.

Officials and experts attribute the crisis to financial irregularities, mismanagement, corruption, poor investments, high costs, and unhealthy competition. Companies are now seeking asset sales, loans, and recovery plans to resume payments, all while facing financial strain and weak regulatory oversight.

In the past year, life insurers settled Tk 8,754 crore in claims, covering 66.06 percent of the total claims filed. Claim settlement rates among life insurers have dropped from 85 percent in 2020 to 66.06 percent in 2025, Idra's data shows.

By comparison, the global average is around 97-98 percent, and in neighbouring India, it was about 98 percent in the 2022-23 fiscal year, according to media reports.

SETTLEMENT RATES AS LOW AS 1.6%

Fareast Islami Life Insurance reported claims of Tk 3,442 crore but paid only Tk 214 crore, leaving 5.66 lakh policyholders

still waiting for Tk 3,228 crore.

Its settlement rate was just 6 percent.

An audit commissioned by Idra in 2021 found Tk 2,367 crore had been embezzled, alongside accounting irregularities worth Tk 432 crore at the company.

The report said much of the money had been siphoned off through inflated land purchases and by taking bank loans secured against the company's Mudaraba Term Deposit Receipts (MTDRs).

An MTDR is a profit bearing account under the Mudaraba system, which pays returns on deposits held for a fixed period.

Several other life insurers also performed poorly.

Padma Islami Life Insurance settled only 4 percent of its obligations, while Progressive Life Insurance paid about 21 percent.

Golden Life Insurance managed 11 percent, and Sunflower Life Insurance just 5.5 percent. Baira Life Insurance paid only 1.6 percent of claims.

By contrast, Akij Takaful Life Insurance, Alpha Islami Life Insurance, Life Insurance Corporation of

READ MORE ON B3

Bangladesh races to secure LNG deliveries amid war

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh's energy security is under fresh pressure as war in the Middle East disrupts the flow of liquefied natural gas (LNG), a fuel that has become indispensable to the country's power sector.

In an effort to maintain supply, the government has confirmed the purchase of seven LNG cargoes from the spot market since the outbreak of the US-Israel war on Iran, at prices more than double those paid just months ago.

Since March 4, state-run Rupantarita Praktik Gas Co Ltd (RPGCL) has floated three tenders to buy LNG cargoes from the spot market amid ongoing uncertainty over timely shipments from Qatar, as Iran continues to halt nearly all shipping through the Strait of Hormuz.

Qatar is a long-term LNG supplier to Bangladesh. It ships a significant proportion of its exports through the Strait, which accounts for roughly a fifth of global LNG flows.

Bangladesh meets almost 30 percent of its gas demand through imported LNG, while domestic production continues to fall short of the total requirement of about 2,650 million cubic feet per day (mmcfd), according to the energy ministry.

A senior RPGCL official said the country usually receives eight to nine LNG cargoes each month, with five to six passing through the Strait of Hormuz.

The US-Israel war on Iran has disrupted supplies of oil, LNG, fertiliser and sulphur through the shipping channel, driving up prices and sparking a global scramble for energy and crop nutrients.

LNG prices have almost doubled from pre-war levels of around \$10-\$12 per MMBtu.

On March 2, QatarEnergy suspended LNG production following an Iranian drone attack, placing additional strain on the global market. Qatar supplies around 20 percent of the world's LNG, according to Al Jazeera.

On March 17, the cabinet committee on government purchase approved the acquisition of two spot LNG cargoes from Aramco Trading Singapore.

The first cargo will cost \$20.96 per MMBtu, and the second \$20.92 per MMBtu. Shipments are expected to arrive between April 15 and 22.

Last week, the government decided to purchase three more cargoes from South Korean and UK-based companies, at more than double December prices.

READ MORE ON B3

Major tourist spots gearing up for long Eid holiday



Tourist spots in Rangamati town are awaiting a surge in visitors as the Eid-ul-Fitr holiday spans seven days. This photo shows the hanging bridge at the town's Parjatan Holiday Complex.

PHOTO: RIKORS CHAKMA

MOKAMMEL SHUVO and RIKORS CHAKMA

Popular tourist spots in the country are preparing to host a massive influx of vacationers as the government has approved a 7-day holiday for Eid-ul-Fitr this year.

Hotel and resort operators in destinations like Cox's Bazar and Sajek Valley are already seeing an uptick in advance bookings for the holiday, hoping to make up for earlier losses from a slowdown in business.

Throughout the holy month of Ramadan, hotel operators in Cox's Bazar were able to retain meagre tourist footfall by offering discounts of as much as 70 percent on room rates. They are now eagerly awaiting the post-Eid season.

Mukim Khan, general secretary of the Cox's Bazar Hotel-Motel Resort Owners' Association, said 60 to 70 percent of hotel bookings have already been completed. Occupancy is expected to reach 80 to 90 percent by the night before Eid.

"We expect around 500,000 to 700,000 tourists to visit Cox's Bazar in the week following Eid."

Political uncertainty surrounding elections had slowed down the tourism sector, but the situation has improved, he added.

"People are now more comfortable planning trips, so we expect a good Eid season for tourism."

Imran Hossain, food and beverage manager at Sayeman Beach Resort, said their

occupancy during Ramadan was around 20 percent.

"We offered up to 60 percent discounts throughout the month," he said.

He added that discounts have now been reduced to 20 percent for the Eid period.

Around 90 percent of rooms in the resort have already been booked until March 26, with full occupancy expected for the first week after Eid.

Visits to hotel and motel zones in Cox's Bazar showed that the area was not completely deserted, unlike in previous years. A noticeable number of tourists visited Cox's Bazar even during the quieter Ramadan period.

READ MORE ON B3

Eid boosts remittance inflow despite Middle East war

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Remittance inflows rose sharply in the first two weeks of March ahead of the Eid-ul-Fitr, despite tensions in the Middle East stemming from the US-Israel war on Iran.

Expatriates sent home \$2.2 billion in the first 14 days of March, up 36 percent from \$1.62 billion during the same period last year, according to Bangladesh Bank (BB) data.

Bankers expect remittances to exceed \$3 billion by the end of the month, as expatriates typically send more money home during Eid. Full data for the month will be available after the Eid holidays.

In February, remittances stood at \$3.02 billion.

In the current fiscal year, inflows have remained strong. Between July and March 14, remittances reached \$24.65 billion, marking a 22.6 percent year-on-year growth.

However, industry insiders and economists warn that inflows may slow in the coming months due to the Middle East crisis.

A BB quarterly report also projected a possible slowdown in remittances amid migration disruptions and economic uncertainty in the region.

The escalating tensions in the Gulf have already driven up prices of oil, liquefied natural gas, fertiliser and sulphur, as Iran controls the Strait of Hormuz, a key route for about one-fifth of global oil exports and nearly one-third of fertiliser shipments.

During March 1-14, Islami Bank Bangladesh handled the highest inflow at \$395 million, followed by BRAC Bank with \$228 million, state-run Agrani Bank with \$165 million, and Trust Bank with \$163 million.

The steady rise in remittances is helping ease pressure on the balance of payments and stabilise the foreign exchange market.

Under the International Monetary Fund's calculation method, reserves were \$29.64 billion, up from \$19.74 billion in the same period last year.

However, signs of volatility have emerged in the foreign exchange market after more than a year, with the taka weakening against the US dollar since early March amid rising uncertainty over the war in the Middle East.

Crop insurance for farmers on the cards: minister

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Agriculture Minister Mohammed Amin Ur Rashid has announced plans to introduce crop insurance to protect farmers from losses caused by natural disasters.

Farmers will receive compensation if their crops are damaged by floods or other calamities, ensuring they are not financially burdened, he said at a rice distribution event at Shyampur High School in Adarsha Sadar upazila of Cumilla yesterday.

The minister said the government is steadily working to fulfil its pre-election commitments, and that since Prime Minister Tarique Rahman assumed office, efforts have been underway to turn them into reality.

He highlighted that initiatives such as family cards, farmer cards, and honorariums for imams and muezzins are already being implemented.

The minister also said the

government has also taken measures to strengthen farmers' financial capacity through incentives, assistance, and easier access to agricultural loans.

Describing agriculture as the backbone of the national economy, he said ensuring financial security for farmers remains a top government priority.

The introduction of crop insurance, alongside existing support programmes, is expected to significantly reduce farmers' vulnerability to natural disasters, he said.

The minister also assured that the country has sufficient food reserves to meet demand in the coming months, and that the government is committed to ensuring that no citizen faces food shortages.

Following the event, jointly arranged by the upazila administration and the upazila food controller's office, a total of 1,879 beneficiaries in Amratoli union each received 30 kg of rice under the food friendly programme.



Farmers will receive compensation if their crops are damaged by floods or other calamities, Agriculture Minister Mohammed Amin Ur Rashid said. PHOTO: STAR/FILE

Latest oil crisis readies hammer for demand curve

REUTERS, New York

It took two Middle East oil shocks for the world to really focus on energy efficiency. The result was a multi-decade, steady reduction in the amount required to produce a certain amount of wealth. If the region's latest crisis persists, it will accelerate the trend into a new gear.

Before 1973, crude held, in real terms, at less than \$30 a barrel. The price was so cheap that consumers couldn't get enough. It replaced dirty coal for heating, catalyzed automaking and inspired scientists to develop new chemicals.

An oil embargo by Opec members against the United States after the 1973 Arab-Israeli War caused the price per barrel to nearly quadruple, even though accompanying production cuts were only about 9 percent of total supply, according to the Center on Global Energy Policy at Columbia University. A few years later, the Iranian Revolution knocked out, 7 percent of the world's supply, leading prices to double.

Economies, naturally, reacted. Shoppers were more discerning and the quest for alternative energy sources intensified. The result has been a steady increase in efficiency, as laid out in the paper, "Oil Intensity: The curious relationship between oil and GDP" Some 53 years ago, it took

about a barrel of oil to support \$1,000 of GDP, but now the same economic output comes from less than half as much. The world kept using more oil, as wealth was growing faster.

US petrol demand exemplifies the story. It grew in tandem with GDP expansion until the 1970s, then detached as cars converted fuel into energy more effectively. Sustained improvements meant gasoline consumption plateaued at around 9 million barrels per day, despite the growing population.

A third crisis is now in the making. Prices are manageable, with \$100 oil about half the inflation-adjusted 2008 rate. The sheer volume being cut off from consumers, however, invites further increases. Around 20 percent of crude, and petroleum liquids, or some 20 million barrels, flow through the Strait of Hormuz. Even if half finds its way to market, the percentage decrease in supply will be larger than the shocks in 1973 and 1979. Fallout from US and Israeli attacks on Iran also affects about 20 percent of worldwide LNG exports, a nascent market in the 1970s.

Demand doesn't swing much in the short run. People need to keep driving to work, heating their homes and shipping goods by truck. Average folks also don't buy oil by the barrel or cryogenically store natural gas. What they care about



An oil tanker is guided to a berth at a port in Qingdao, in China's eastern Shandong province, on March 16. PHOTO: AFP

is end products. The mix varies by country, but about 43 percent of US crude and related liquids are turned into gasoline. Another fifth goes into diesel and heating oil while much of the remainder becomes everyday items like clothes, soap, furniture and paint. They will all cost more, further squeezing shoppers still feeling the pinch from recent bouts of inflation.

Texas tells the tale. It's the heart of the US energy industry, but heating oil off its own coast costs 50 percent more than a few weeks ago. Gasoline has jumped 75 percent. Prices for other goods heavily exported from

doubled from January to December. Daily desire increased just 1.1 percent from the previous year, compared to 3.5 percent in 2003 when a barrel cost less than half as much, according to the Statistical Review of World Energy. While usage increased slowly in developing nations, consumption in rich countries fell. The higher that oil prices go and the longer they last, the more downward pressure on demand they'll exert.

The reasons are fairly straightforward. People don't buy cars often, but consistently higher petrol prices make a smaller, more fuel-efficient one more attractive. This is also the first Middle East oil crisis since power generated by the sun, wind and batteries became cheap and widely available. Oil consumption in developed countries has been essentially stagnant. Sales of electric cars, heat pumps and solar panels should accelerate. Still, the United States only spent about 6 percent of GDP on energy last year compared to 13 percent in 1979.

More pronounced are changes for developing nations, where fossil fuel use keeps rising. Brazil, Russia, India and China consume more than 40 percent of the world's energy, and far less efficiently than the international average, according to Enerdata. Ecologically conscientious goods have boomed in recent years

as prices fall, making the overall cost cheaper than those powered by fossil fuels. Spiking oil and gas costs in such countries makes the decision to switch even easier.

Solar installations are already growing rapidly in poorer countries. Electric car sales from Indonesia to Uruguay are rocketing as well, and far outpace US adoption. In India, sales of electric induction stoves have jumped, as people worry about access to cooking gas. Automaker VinFast is offering discounts to persuade owners of gasoline-powered cars to switch to its electric ones at home in Vietnam, as well as in India and Indonesia.

Governments will also adapt. Countries like China, Vietnam and Thailand will be hit hardest, according to the World Bank, because their economies are tethered to energy-intensive manufacturing, while others lean on either services or agriculture. Asia is also a big importer. About 80 percent of Qatari liquefied natural gas, for example, is sold into the continent. The situation in Iran can only motivate policy that weans from fossil fuels.

Pakistan is racing to do so. It has deployed solar quickly, going from a negligible amount of electricity generation to about 25 percent. The country's power minister told Reuters he would double down on green power rather than risk energy security.



M Nazeem A Choudhury, additional managing director of Prime Bank, and Jahid Hussain, founder of Export Sheba, pose with the signed document along with other senior officials from both organisations. PHOTO: PRIME BANK

Prime Bank, Export Sheba partner to support exporters

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Prime Bank has recently signed a strategic agreement with Export Sheba to promote export business development and strengthen the capabilities of SME and emerging exporters in Bangladesh.

The signing ceremony was held in Dhaka, marking a joint initiative to enhance exporter readiness through structured training, advisory support and knowledge dissemination, according to a press

release.

Under the agreement, Export Sheba will organise export-focused training programmes, workshops, and advisory sessions to help entrepreneurs better understand international trade practices, export documentation, and global market opportunities.

The initiative will particularly focus on supporting non-RMG export sectors and guiding new exporters toward structured and compliant export operations.

The agreement was signed by M

Nazeem A Choudhury, additional managing director of Prime Bank, and Jahid Hussain, founder of Export Sheba, in the presence of senior officials from both organisations.

The strategic agreement reflects Prime Bank's continued commitment to strengthening Bangladesh's export ecosystem and positioning the Prime Bank SME TradeFin Centre as a leading platform for exporter knowledge, advisory support, and sustainable export growth.

Gold prices ease From silos to synergy

REUTERS

Gold prices ticked down on Wednesday, as investors weighed the risk of a more hawkish US Federal Reserve policy stance, with high oil prices increasing concerns over renewed inflation pressures.

Spot gold fell 0.4 percent at \$4,986.79 per ounce as of 0915 GMT. US gold futures for April delivery fell 0.3 percent to \$4,990.70.

"Investors are worried about rates staying 'higher-for-longer' due to elevated energy prices ... the longer the Iran conflict goes on, the more likely that scenario," making non-yielding gold less attractive, said Jamie Dutta, market analyst at Nemo.money.

The Middle East conflict is in its third week, as Iran targeted Tel Aviv with missiles in what it said was retaliation for Israel's assassination of Iran's security chief Ali Larjani, Iranian state television reported on Wednesday.

Brent crude oil prices eased slightly, but held above \$100 per barrel, as escalation in the Iran conflict and the ongoing closure of the Strait of Hormuz offset some relief to supply concerns.

Elevated oil prices add to inflationary pressures by pushing up transport costs. While gold is viewed as a hedge against inflation and uncertainty, high interest rates curb its appeal by raising the cost of holding bullion and boosting returns on yield-bearing assets.

These arrangements focus on alignment and information sharing, not on centralising authority.

FROM PAGE B4

Fintech and digital lending underline the same trend. These services combine banking functions, digital platforms and connectivity, alongside software, data and security concerns. Competition policy and taxation cut across all of them.

When regulators operate in isolation, such overlaps can create uncertainty, duplicative compliance and delays for new services. Gaps between mandates may leave risks insufficiently regulated or encourage regulatory arbitrage. Fragmentation also weakens the ability to manage systemic risks, especially when shocks, such as cyber incidents or payment disruptions, spread quickly across sectors.

Crisis management is a particular concern. Cyber threats, digital fraud and infrastructure failures rarely respect sectoral lines, yet responses are often confined within single institutions. This increases the risk of delay or misalignment. Stronger collaboration is therefore critical for economic efficiency, financial stability and consumer protection.

It can reduce uncertainty, support innovation and ensure consistent standards while aligning with Bangladesh's wider digital ambitions. Importantly, this does not require sacrificing regulatory independence or creating a "super regulator". It is about coherent oversight through aligned processes, shared risk assessment and regular collaboration.

These arrangements focus on alignment and information sharing, not on centralising authority.

Several Commonwealth countries have adopted converged or functionally coordinated regulatory models without dismantling their broader administrative structures. The United Kingdom, for example, moved early towards a converged regulator model by integrating telecoms, broadcasting and spectrum oversight within a single authority, while maintaining strong coordination with competition and data protection bodies.

Australia followed a similar path by aligning telecommunications, broadcasting and online content regulation within a unified framework, complemented by clear coordination mechanisms with competition, financial and cybersecurity regulators. Singapore, though institutionally distinct, shows how strong statutory coordination and clear lead regulator principles can achieve convergence outcomes even when regulators remain formally separate.

In all these cases, convergence was achieved with minimal bureaucratic disruption. Rather than wholesale restructuring, reforms focused on harmonising mandates, adopting technology-neutral laws, clarifying inter-agency responsibilities and institutionalising coordination mechanisms.

In Bangladesh, coordination currently takes place mainly through informal consultations or ministry-led committees, often on an ad hoc basis. While

useful, these mechanisms lack permanence and institutional memory. There is no standing platform where regulators can regularly discuss emerging cross-sector risks, align regulatory priorities, or jointly plan responses to technological change.

A practical way forward would be to institutionalise an inter-regulatory coordination framework. Such a framework could bring together regulators like BTRC, Bangladesh Bank, BER, BSEC, the Competition Commission, ICT authorities, Information Commission and NBR to address cross-cutting issues such as digital finance, smart infrastructure, data governance and platform-based markets. Much of this can be achieved through executive decisions and interagency agreements, without immediate changes to existing laws.

As the Bangladesh economy becomes more digital and interconnected, regulatory effectiveness will depend not only on the strength of individual institutions but also on how well they work together. The question is no longer whether inter-regulatory collaboration is needed, but how quickly it can become a permanent feature of the governance framework. Initially, a cell could be formed under the Cabinet Division or the Prime Minister's Office to begin coordinating different regulators.

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The proposed SIM activation system aims to prevent fraud, such as registration using photos, screens, videos, masks, or deepfakes, and would enable customers to activate mobile connections remotely through a smartphone. PHOTO: STAR/FILE

SIM REGISTRATION

BTRC approves experimental facial verification trial

MAHMUDUL HASAN

Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) has approved a proposal from mobile operators to test a new system that would allow citizens to register SIM cards using real-time facial "liveness" verification.

This process aims to prevent fraud, such as registration using photos, screens, videos, masks, or deepfakes, and would enable customers to activate mobile connections remotely through a smartphone.

Association of Mobile Telecom Operators of Bangladesh (AMTOB) submitted the proposal to BTRC, with technical support from a licensed certifying authority, Relief Validation Limited (RVL).

After reviewing the submission, the BTRC approved a six-month proof of concept to test SIM registration following this method.

For now, the trial will be held exclusively on an experimental basis, with no commercial use. Moreover, the facial data acquired during the process must be deleted after the trial.

Under the proposal, RVL will provide the technology and verification

infrastructure for facial liveness checks and digital identity authentication.

"We have approved a proof of concept because technology has evolved, and we want to see whether the process can be made easier for customers," Md Emdad ul Bari, chairman of BTRC, told The Daily Star.

"At present, biometric verification is mandatory for SIM registration. This means customers must visit a customer care centre for services such as new SIM registration, SIM replacement, or ownership transfer," he added.

"If the proof of concept shows that the system can ensure proper verification without security risks, we may consider allowing it to be fully implemented."

HOW THE SYSTEM WORKS

"Facial recognition-based SIM registration is an early-stage alternative biometric method, like fingerprint scanning. Several certified authorities have expressed interest, and the proof of concept will begin soon," said Mohammad Zulfikar, secretary general of AMTOB.

According to the proposal, customers would start SIM registration through a mobile operator's app.

The system would capture images of the front and back of the user's National

Identity (NID) card and use optical character recognition to extract key details such as the NID number, name, and date of birth.

Using the NID number, RVL would retrieve the citizen's official photograph from the Election Commission database.

The user would then take a live selfie or record a short video. The system would compare it with the NID photo using facial recognition and liveness detection to confirm that the person is physically present. If the match fails, the process stops.

For liveness detection, users will be asked to perform simple actions -- like blinking or turning their head -- to confirm authenticity.

Once the verification is successful, RVL would generate a digitally signed report and would send it to the BTRC's Central Biometric Verification Monitoring Platform (CBVMP) and the operator.

After confirming RVL's signature and the customer's identity, the operator would link the mobile number and resubmit it to CBVMP for final approval. The system could also allow remote eSIM activation.

RVL informed regulators that it is legally authorised under the ICT Act and

CCA rules to collect and store customer data, including NID number, name, date of birth, address, mobile number, and email address.

To protect this information, RVL uses strong encryption, hardware security modules, distributed denial-of-service protection, malware defence, and web application firewalls. Its AI system can also detect spoofing attempts and accurately match older NID photos.

CONDITIONAL APPROVAL BY BTRC

The BTRC has set several conditions for the trial. It will apply only to new SIM registrations, remain strictly experimental with no commercial use, and run alongside existing biometric verification.

Operators must get customers' consent before collecting biometric data and ensure protections.

All data handling must follow international security standards. Facial data cannot be stored beyond the approved framework and must be deleted after the trial.

BTRC will closely monitor the process. "By law, mobile operators cannot store biometric data, and they also do not store any fingerprint data under the current SIM registration process," Zulfikar said.

Iran vets friendly ships for Hormuz passage: trackers

AFP, London

Iran is selecting ships from friendly countries to pass through the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial trade waterway cut off by the Middle East war, data trackers indicated Tuesday.

Tehran's forces have closed off the waterway, through which a fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas passes in peacetime, with deadly hits reported on vessels since the war began with US-Israeli strikes on Iran on February 28.

But at least five ships exited the Strait via Iranian waters on March 15 and 16, maritime intelligence firm Windward said in an analysis report on Tuesday.

"The new route illustrates how Iran's selective blockade has evolved to allow allies and supporters to transit", it said, citing its tracking as "rising evidence that Iran is exerting permission-based transit and control of the strait".

Natasha Kaneva, a commodities analyst at JPMorgan bank, said in an analysis on Monday that at least four ships had been tracked exiting the strait via the Larak-Qeshm Channel, near the Iranian coast, over the previous two days.

"This is not a standard route for vessels and could reflect a process designed to confirm vessel ownership and cargo, enabling passage for ships that are not affiliated to the US or its allies," she said in a note sent to AFP.

The vessels included bulk carriers and one oil tanker, the Pakistani-flagged Karachi.

Tracking site MarineTraffic said the Karachi transited the strait with its automatic transponder system activated -- where most vessels keep it turned off to avoid being targeted.

Kaneva said most of the crude passing through the strait was headed for Asia, principally China.

Currencies tread water

REUTERS, Tokyo/London

The US dollar inched higher on Wednesday as easing crude oil prices steadied currency markets ahead of a series of central bank meetings.

The greenback was little changed against the British pound and Japanese yen, which pulled back from levels where traders had braced for possible intervention by Tokyo ahead of a meeting in Washington between US President Donald Trump and Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi.

It was slightly firmer against the euro, which dipped after two sessions of gains as traders awaited the start of a two-day European Central Bank meeting.

The dollar has strengthened overall since the US and Israel attacked Iran almost three weeks ago, reaching a 10-month high late last week as the conflict and rising oil prices drove investors into safe-haven US assets.

With no sign of de-escalation, Brent futures prices have settled above \$100 a barrel for four consecutive sessions, though prices dipped on Wednesday after Iraqi and Kurdish authorities agreed to resume oil exports via Turkey's Ceyhan port.

Major tourist spots

FROM PAGE B1

At Sugandha Beach, businessman Bishwajit Roy from Dhaka's Chawkbazar was seen vacationing with his family.

"Hotels offer special discounts during Ramadan, and the crowd is thinner. That's why I chose this time to visit," he said. He added that cooking facilities in hotels made food arrangements convenient.

Zahid Russell, manager of a mid-range hotel, Delowar Paradise, near Sugandha Beach, said they have 60 two-bedroom units. On average, only six to seven units were rented regularly during Ramadan.

"We have to pay over Tk 10 lakh in monthly expenses, but income was very low compared to that," he said.

Russell added that discounts of up to 70 percent were offered. Although some units were rented, it only slightly reduced their losses, and profit was out of the question.

RANGAMATI HOTELS, RESORTS BOOKED IN ADVANCE

In Rangamati, hotel, motel, resort,

and cottage owners have completed preparations to welcome visitors, with most accommodations already nearly fully booked.

Sajek Valley remains the most popular tourist destination in the Rangamati district. Every year, hundreds of thousands of tourists visit the destination.

This Eid, around 111 resorts and cottages in Sajek are ready to receive visitors.

"Bookings started five days ago. All resorts and cottages in Sajek are fully booked from March 22 to 27," said Surpan Deb Barma, president of the Sajek Resort and Cottage Owners Association.

"Even if someone wants a room now, we cannot provide it, as nothing is available."

He added that tourist turnout is expected to be higher than last year.

"Last year, business was affected due to political instability. This time, we expect better business as the Eid holiday is longer this year."

Apart from Sajek, Rangamati town and other lake-centric tourist spots are also buzzing with anticipation for

the holiday.

Kaptai Lake remains the main attraction, around which much of the district's tourism industry has developed. Most resorts, hotels, and entertainment facilities are located along the lake.

Alok Bikash Chakma, manager of the Rangamati Tourism Holiday Complex, said, "We have 87 rooms in total, accommodating up to 170 guests. Around 80 percent of rooms are already booked from March 22 to 28."

The iconic hanging bridge over the lake has been repainted ahead of Eid, he said.

"With the extended holiday, favourable weather, and improved security conditions, we expect a record number of tourists in Rangamati this year."

Sumet Chakma, general secretary of the Rangamati Resort Owners Association and owner of Borgi Lake Valley, said, "All our resorts are fully booked from March 18 to 29. All 13 member resorts under our association are also fully booked from March 22 to 28."

Life insurers face mounting unpaid claims

FROM PAGE B1

Bangladesh, and Mercantile Islami Life Insurance have settled all their claims.

INSURERS CITE PAST MISMANAGEMENT

Abdur Rahim Bhuiyan, chief executive officer (CEO) of Fareast Islami Life Insurance Company, said the company's backlog of claims is caused by past financial irregularities, corruption, and fund misappropriation, which caused a severe liquidity crisis.

"The board plans to sell some land assets by 2026 and may take loans to improve cash flow," he added.

Bhuiyan also said the company aims to make significant claim payments this year.

companies recover, but we have received no update," he added.

Chowdhury highlighted past irregularities between 2011 and 2014, such as unreported policies and missing money receipts, which created claim backlogs. "When clients claimed their funds, the money remained pending," he said.

He added that after the political changeover in August 2024, operational funding stopped, halting many claim settlements.

Morshed Alam Siddiqui, managing director of Padma Islami Life Insurance, said the company faces a liquidity crisis, which is slowing claim settlement.

He acknowledged that past mismanagement and fund

Adeeba Rahman, first vice-president of the Bangladesh Insurance Association and sponsor director of Delta Life Insurance, said the decline in claim settlements is due to institutional mismanagement and severe financial stress.

"Many companies operate with almost depleted funds. Premium income is often diverted to excessive administrative costs or investments benefiting personal interests, causing serious liquidity shortages," she added.

Rahman added that there have been allegations against some chairmen and directors for embezzling hundreds of crores. Political changeover in 2024 and economic uncertainty weakened public confidence, and the situation worsened in 2025.

She also criticised the regulator for failing to enforce the 90-day claim settlement rule. "Declining investment is largely due to fund shortages and growing mistrust in the sector," she said.

WEAK OVERSIGHT LEAVES CUSTOMERS WAITING

Md Main Uddin, professor of Banking and Insurance at the University of Dhaka, said poor performance in 2024 carried over into 2025 due to earlier disruptions.

"Many companies failed to earn enough on investments, limiting their ability to pay claims. In some cases, claims were deliberately not paid."

Uddin added that older insurers are trapped in unprofitability and long claim backlogs. "Some avoid settlements because they expect little legal consequence."

He said that without regulatory reforms, such as consolidating weak companies and expanding mandatory health insurance, the sector will struggle to match the country's economic growth.

Md Apel Mahmud, a lifetime member of Idr, said the drop in settlement rates is caused by major discrepancies in company practices. "Some companies report large claim amounts but pay only a small portion," he said.

MAJOR UNDERPERFORMERS IN CLAIM SETTLEMENT

COMPANY	CLAIMS (IN CRORE TK)	PAID (IN CRORE TK)	SETTLEMENT	UNPAID POLICYHOLDERS
Fareast Islami Life	3,442	214	6%	5.66 lakh
Padma Islami Life	280.81	11.21	4%	2.35 lakh
Progressive Life	207.15	44.50	21%	42,162
Golden Life	52.44	5.77	11%	18,331
Sunflower Life	234.35	12.93	5.5%	84,943
Baira Life	80.61	1.31	1.6%	33,131

Bangladesh races to secure LNG

FROM PAGE B1

These shipments are expected between April 5 and 13. UK-based TotalEnergies Gas & Power Ltd will supply one cargo at \$21.58 per MMBtu, while South Korea-based Posco International Corporation will provide two cargoes at \$20.76 per MMBtu.

Earlier, state-run Petrobangla secured two emergency LNG cargoes for March deliveries at nearly three times December prices. One cargo was purchased from US-based Gunvor at \$28.28 per MMBtu, while a second from Vitol cost \$23.08 per MMBtu.

By comparison, LNG purchased in December cost just \$9.99 per MMBtu. Bangladesh's power sector has

transformed rapidly over the past decade. Domestic gas production, long the backbone of electricity generation, has stagnated as major gas fields mature.

To bridge the supply gap, the government began importing LNG in 2018 via floating storage and regasification units (FSRUs) at Moheshkhali. Since then, LNG has become a structurally vital component of the energy mix.

In 2025, Bangladesh spent roughly \$3.88 billion to import 109 LNG cargoes, compared with \$3.02 billion for 86 cargoes in 2024, reflecting rising demand and higher prices, according to data from Dhaka-based management consulting firm LightCastle Partners.

Qatar remains the country's dominant supplier. In 2025, QatarEnergy received around \$1.2 billion, the largest single supplier payment, for delivering 40 contracted cargoes.

Oman's OQ Trading supplied a further 16 under long-term agreements, while the remaining 48 cargoes were bought from the spot market, according to LightCastle data.

Because Qatar's LNG exports originate in the Persian Gulf, most shipments to Bangladesh must transit the Strait of Hormuz.

As a result, the country's energy supply chain remains structurally vulnerable to disruptions in Gulf shipping routes.

Noor Mohammed Bhuiyan, CEO of Baira Life Insurance Company, said the firm has faced challenges since 2010, including management changes and an Idr-appointed administrator.

He added that land and building investments by previous management are now worth much less.

"We have Idr approval to sell assets, including a Malibagh property acquired for a metro rail station," Bhuiyan said.

Amzad Hossain Khan Chowdhury, CEO of Golden Life Insurance, said pending claims and limited funds have made operations difficult.

"We requested government loans through the Bangladesh Insurance Association two months ago. Tk 20-Tk 25 crore could help smaller

misappropriation contributed to the problem.

"We are trying to sell plots of land to improve cash flow, but buyers offer less than the purchase prices. Previous attempts before the national election failed," he said.

Saidul Amin, CEO of Progressive Life Insurance, said that mismanagement from 2020 to 2023, along with irregularities in land purchases between 2010 and 2015, contributed to the liquidity crisis and delayed claim settlements. Bad investments worth around Tk 30 crore worsened the situation.

"The Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission reconstituted our board in July 2023, and we are now following a three-year recovery plan," Amin added.

Eid fails to lift electronics sales amid weak demand



JAGARAN CHAKMA

Sales of electronics and home appliances are witnessing an unusual slowdown even close to Eid-ul-Fitr, with demand for products such as televisions and refrigerators showing only marginal improvement and remaining near regular-day levels instead of the customary festive surge.

Saikat Azad, head of distributors at Transcom Electronics Limited, said the usual pre-Eid sales momentum is largely absent this year, even with only a few days left before the festival. Despite visiting multiple markets outside Dhaka, including in northern regions, he observed a similar lack of demand across the board.

"Customers are not coming to stores. Many seem concerned about the near-term outlook," he said.

The slowdown has weighed heavily on key Eid driven product categories such as televisions and refrigerators. Both segments – especially refrigerators – are performing well below expectations this time.

Azad estimates demand has fallen by 30 to 40 percent compared to a typical Eid season. Even with flat discounts of 30 percent and ongoing promotional campaigns, customer response has been minimal, with limited inquiries.

He said the late surge in buying – common in previous years – has yet to materialise, raising doubts about a

significant recovery before Eid.

Nurul Afsar, deputy managing director of Electro Mart Group, echoed the concerns.

Sales have fallen about 20 percent year-on-year, he said. Even typically strong segments like televisions and refrigerators are underperforming, as global uncertainty and cautious consumer spending weigh on buying decisions.

Despite a "Gold Offer" campaign offering ornaments or cash with purchases of high-end TVs, microwaves and other appliances, demand remains weak.

"Business is poor for everyone. Sales are almost like regular days, whereas Eid usually brings a significant boost," said Mahmudul Islam Raz, brand manager of Rangs eMart.

"Usually, during Eid, demand rises as people buy products like refrigerators and televisions. But this year, sales are about 30 percent below expectations," he said.

Raz attributed the slowdown partly to economic pressure and cautious consumer spending.

"Inflation remains high, and many people appear to have less cash flow, which is affecting purchasing decisions," he said.

He also pointed to seasonal factors, noting that electronics sales often peak during hotter months when demand for products such as air conditioners and refrigerators increases.

"But this year, that seasonal demand has not picked up yet," he added.

To attract customers, Rangs eMart has introduced Eid promotions offering cashback, gifts and discounts of up to 48 percent on selected products.

"The impact of these offers has not yet been visible in the market," he said, adding that most retailers are facing similar conditions this season.

Usually, demand rises during Eid as people buy products like refrigerators and televisions. But this year, sales are about 30 percent below expectations

Mahmudul Islam Raz
Brand manager of Rangs eMart

Salim Uddin, director (marketing) at Jamuna Electronics, said Eid typically accounts for a major share of annual sales for consumer electronics brands.

"More than 70 percent of consumer electronics sales are driven by the two Eid festivals," he said.

According to him, Eid-ul-Fitr usually boosts sales of televisions and small

home appliances such as juicers, blenders and rice cookers, while Eid-ul-Azha sees higher demand for refrigerators and deep freezers.

However, he said the usual festive sales momentum has yet to build this year.

"In previous years, all electronics brands used to run extensive campaigns on television, newspapers and digital platforms. But this year, such promotions are much less visible," he said.

Jamuna Electronics has launched its "Eid-e Double Khushi" consumer promotion campaign, offering special discounts, gifts and a digital lottery featuring a car as a mega prize.

"Despite these initiatives, the expected sales momentum has not yet materialised," he added.

Zohab Ahmed, chief marketing officer at Walton Hi-Tech Industries Plc, said sales have been strong ahead of Eid, but profit margins have not improved despite higher demand for electronic devices.

He attributed this to a sharp rise in the cost of importing raw materials and components, driven by the strengthening US dollar, which has pushed up production expenses.

However, Walton has not raised product prices in line with the increased costs in order to keep them within consumers' purchasing power. As a result, profit margins have remained largely unchanged despite the Eid sales boost.

Priorities for govt: governance, revenue and debt

AF NESARUDDIN

The Daily Star on February 19, 2026, a day after the new government took office, published an article titled "New govt faces 5 early economic tests". It identified the five tests as: 1) Keep food prices from rising, 2) Secure IMF support and stabilise the economy, 3) Control government spending and debt, 4) Boost revenue collection and plug tax leakage, and 5) Prepare for life after LDC status.

However, in this assessment, two major impediments to economic growth – governance (including corruption) and revenue collection – have not been focused prominently enough.

Governance failures are evident across almost all sectors of the economy over the past 15 years, if not longer. Non-adherence to laws and regulations, unqualified individuals in key positions, ineffective independent directors, undue political interference, including influence over the legal system, and weak ethical standards and professionalism have all contributed to this problem, impacting economic growth.

Together, these factors have placed the economy and its growth under sustained strain.

Weak or absent governance has enabled widespread corruption, including the syphoning of funds. For many years, Bangladesh has ranked among the countries with a high perception of corruption.

Despite widespread discussion and extensive media coverage, there has been little improvement. Almost everyone is aware of corruption, whether as a beneficiary or a victim. Although the relevant agencies remain active, the overall level of corruption has not come down.

Without clear political will, it is unlikely that any meaningful progress will be achieved.

Foreign debt obligation and management is another important issue. According to media reports, the interim government had not undertaken any new mega project, but external debt has increased by about \$10 billion to keep under-construction projects ongoing.

Another approximately \$45 billion is in the pipeline as commitment awaiting release in line with progress of construction.

Since most projects are at different phases of construction, the government has no scope to abandon them. Ultimately, foreign debts will touch nearly \$150 billion. This scenario is based on the assumption that if the new government undertakes any new mega projects, foreign debt will further increase.

How will these debts be repaid? Revenues from completed projects are insufficient to repay instalments. We have no option but to increase our internal revenue collection through both direct and indirect taxes.

For many years, Bangladesh's taxation system has been marked by a narrow tax base, a low tax-to-GDP ratio, tax evasion, and corruption. The government has taken various isolated measures over the years, but results have fallen short of expectations. This situation cannot continue indefinitely.

Many developing countries have addressed similar problems and improved their tax-to-GDP ratios. Long overdue tax reforms, including digitalisation as an effective tool, have no real alternative if the current situation is to improve.

Bangladesh currently faces numerous economic challenges. The priorities should be streamlining governance, reducing corruption, and increasing revenue collection significantly. Until the fundamental structure is in place and economic engines are activated, economic management becomes more challenging, if not impossible.

To manage external debts, these economic priorities have no alternative. Political will is important to prioritise the challenges and take the economy forward.

AF Nesaruddin is a senior partner of Hoda Vasi Chowdhury & Co and former president of ICAB



Iraq resumes limited oil exports via Turkey

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq announced on Wednesday it had resumed limited oil exports of 250,000 bpd through the Turkish port of Ceyhan after the country's output plunged due to disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz.

A founding member of the Opec cartel, crude oil sales make up 90 percent of Iraq's budget revenues. Before the outbreak of war on February 28, Iraq mainly shipped its oil – roughly 3.5 million barrels per day – from the southern Basra fields via the Strait of Hormuz.

The state-owned North Oil Company said it "has begun operating the Sarlo pumping station to resume pumping and exporting Kirkuk oil to the port of Ceyhan with an initial capacity of 250,000 barrels per day".

Iraq resumed oil exports from its fields in the northern Kirkuk province "after a disruptive period that posed a significant challenge to the oil sector," and in agreement with the autonomous Kurdistan Region, through which the pipeline to Turkey's port of Ceyhan runs.

Iraq has been scrambling to find a solution to export its oil, and there have been long-running talks with Iraqi Kurdistan to ship it through the autonomous region.

Kurdish authorities had asked for several measures in return, before agreeing to let the oil flow through the region's pipeline.

The Kurdistan natural resources ministry said that the Sarlo oil station began operating at 6:30 am (0330 GMT) to enable exports via the Kurdistan region pipeline to the port of Ceyhan.

From silos to synergy: Rethinking Bangladesh's regulatory framework



MD MUSTAFA KAMAL

Bangladesh's regulatory system has long been organised along sectoral lines. Separate authorities oversee telecommunications, banking and financial services, energy, capital markets, competition, ICT and taxation. This structure worked when sectors operated largely in isolation. Today, technological change and digitalisation have reshaped how these sectors function. Economic activity no longer sits neatly within regulatory boundaries. Decisions taken by one regulator increasingly affect outcomes in others. This growing interdependence makes closer collaboration not just desirable, but essential.

Several key regulators now operate in overlapping domains. The Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) regulates telecommunications, data transmission and digital platforms. The Bangladesh Bank oversees banks, digital payments, fintech activities and aspects of cybersecurity in the financial system. The Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC) regulates energy pricing and is becoming more involved in smart grids and digital metering. The Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC) governs capital markets, including digital trading platforms and technology-driven investment services. Alongside them, the Competition Commission ensures fair market practices, the ICT Division and the Digital Security Agency handle digital governance and cybersecurity, and the National Board of Revenue (NBR) administers taxation of digital services.

Individually, these mandates are clear. Collectively, they intersect in ways traditional models did not anticipate. Mobile financial services offer a clear example. They rely on telecom networks regulated by BTRC, financial rules overseen by Bangladesh Bank, digital security frameworks shaped by ICT authorities, and taxation policies administered by NBR. A regulatory change in one domain, whether on data usage, transaction limits or pricing, can ripple across the rest.

A particularly urgent area of convergence is broadcasting and telecommunications, where technological change has blurred old boundaries. Broadcasting was once a content-focused, one-to-many service under the information ministry, while telecommunications centred on infrastructure under BTRC. That distinction no longer holds. Audiovisual content is now delivered over IP-based networks through OTT platforms, streaming services, IPTV and

social media. Spectrum, infrastructure, data networks and content distribution are tightly integrated. As a result, the roles of BTRC and the information ministry increasingly overlap.

Decisions on spectrum allocation, network capacity, platform licensing, service quality and consumer protection now carry implications for both sectors. OTT platforms depend on telecom networks, yet raise questions about content standards, advertising, cultural policy and taxation. IPTV and hybrid services sit squarely at this intersection.

A similar pattern is emerging in energy. Smart meters and digital billing systems lie at the crossroads of energy regulation, ICT infrastructure, data governance and consumer protection. While BERC focuses on pricing and policy, telecom connectivity, data privacy and cybersecurity fall under other authorities. Without coordination, gaps and inconsistencies are almost inevitable.

READ MORE ON B2



A customer receives mobile financial service at a street-side shop, reflecting the rapid growth of digital financial services and the convergence of telecommunications and banking in Bangladesh.

PHOTO: STAR/FILE

South Korea secures extra 18m barrels of oil from UAE

AFP, Seoul

South Korea said on Wednesday it would receive an additional 18 million barrels of oil from the United Arab Emirates through multiple supply channels as the Iran war disrupts global supplies and sends prices higher.

About 70 percent of South Korea's crude oil imports pass through the Strait of Hormuz, which Iran has effectively closed since US-Israeli strikes began on February 28.

"The UAE will supply six million barrels via three UAE-flagged vessels, and an additional 12 million barrels will be delivered on six Korea-flagged vessels," Kang Hoon-sik, presidential chief of staff, said at a press briefing.

They will deliver the oil through "diversified supply channels", he said, declining to elaborate on the route.

"As 70 percent of the crude oil we import passes through the Strait of Hormuz, securing alternative supply routes that bypass the strait is urgently needed," he added.

The world's eighth-largest consumer of crude oil has also struck an agreement with the UAE that would allow it to "make emergency purchase of crude oil at any time". It follows an earlier deal to import around four million barrels of oil from the UAE and allows it to use up to two million barrels from jointly held strategic reserves that the UAE stores in South Korea upon request.

The war has prompted Seoul to impose a fuel price cap for the first time in nearly 30 years.

The country consumes around 2.5 million barrels per day as of the end of 2024, according to Worldometer.