

Star BUSINESS



Farmers pay more for fertilisers despite no major shortage

Weak monitoring and patchy distribution cause artificial crises amid war-led supply disruptions



A farmer spreads fertiliser across a paddy field in Rajshahi district during the Boro season. Boro paddy accounts for most of the country's annual fertiliser use. The photo was taken recently. PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

SUKANTA HALDER, S DILIP ROY and DIPANKAR ROY

Mamunur Rashid expects to harvest his Boro paddy and maize in the coming months. The crops need no more fertiliser before reaping, and so far, he has not faced any major supply problem.

Now he is preparing plots for green chillies, brinjal and two hybrid varieties of paddy. Those crops will require different nutrients.

The farmer in northern district Kurigram said there have been no supply disruptions or price hikes for high-nitrogen urea or muriate of potash (MOP), a concentrated potassium fertiliser.

But phosphate fertilisers are another matter. Rashid said supplies of both di ammonium phosphate, known as DAP, and triple superphosphate, or TSP, are thin on the ground and prices

are higher than usual.

The US-Israel war on Iran and the wider Middle East conflict have rattled global fertiliser supply chains, pushing up prices and fuelling food security concerns worldwide. In a recent report, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said Bangladesh faces an

"extreme risk profile" in fertiliser supply.

Officials, however, reject the idea of an imminent crunch. They say urea stocks will last until June and non-urea supplies until October.

However, The Daily Star, after speaking to farmers in at least 10 districts across the country, found instances of overpricing linked to supply shortages, which officials attributed to attempts to cash in on war-driven disruptions.

Zahurul Haque, a farmer at Aditmari upazila of Lalmonirhat, said the local authorised dealer could not provide enough phosphate fertiliser. He bought TSP and DAP from retailers instead, paying more.

Phosphate fertilisers are vital for strong plant growth and better yields. Without them, productivity suffers.

According to the Bangladesh Agricultural Development

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Starlink gains just 3,500 users after 8 months in Bangladesh

MAHMUDUL HASAN

Elon Musk's Starlink has received a lukewarm response in Bangladesh in the first eight months since its launch in the country, as prices up to ten times higher than local broadband fail to attract subscribers.

The satellite internet service, operated by SpaceX, attracted only 3,469 customers as of January 2026, according to data from the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC).

Starlink received its operating licence on April 29, 2025, and officially launched on May 20, initially offering two residential packages priced at Tk 6,000 and Tk 4,200 per month.

These rates are at least ten times higher than local broadband services, which on average start at Tk 400 for 5 Mbps and can reach up to Tk 1,200 for 40 Mbps.

Bangladesh has over 13 crore internet subscribers, including 1.45 crore broadband users.

Starlink's uptake in Bangladesh is also considerably slower than in other markets where it launched in recent years.

In Kenya, which has fewer than 3 crore internet users, Starlink has managed to gain 4,808 subscribers in eight months since its July 2023 launch, according to data from the country's Communications Authority.

Nigeria, with over 15 crore reported internet users, recorded 23,897 Starlink subscribers roughly 11 months after launching in January 2023, according to the Nigerian Communications Commission.

Industry insiders say Bangladesh's dense population, widespread low-cost fibre coverage, and extensive mobile internet penetration have limited Starlink's appeal.

Three authorised resellers — Robi Axiata, Felicity IDC, and Bangladesh Satellite Company — have each signed \$2.5 million deals to distribute Starlink's business and priority plans.

All three report difficulty finding customers willing to pay premium prices.

"General users are concentrated in areas with fibre coverage," said Shah Ahmedul Kabir, general manager for sales and marketing at Bangladesh Satellite Company.

"So, we are focusing on niche markets such as hill tracts, remote char areas, maritime applications for fishing boats, and mobile connectivity on long-haul buses and trains," he added.

Bangladesh Satellite Company has sold around 400 Starlink terminals and connected 12 schools across three hill tract districts, with plans to expand to over 150 schools.

Sharful Alam, chief executive of Felicity IDC, said enterprises view Starlink primarily as backup internet connectivity rather than a core service.

"It's unlikely that people will abandon existing broadband services, given the significant price difference," he said.

Felicity IDC's Starlink packages, offering 1 TB (terabyte) to 4 TB data allowances, range from Tk 25,000 to Tk 75,000.

Starlink has built infrastructure at Hi-Tech City in

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Eastern Bank PLC.

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Brent heads for record monthly jump as Houthi attacks widen Gulf conflict

REUTERS, New Delhi

Oil prices extended gains on Monday, with Brent headed for a record monthly rise, after Yemeni Houthis launched their first attacks on Israel over the weekend, widening the US-Israel war with Iran in the Middle East.

Brent crude futures jumped \$3.94, or 3.5 percent, to \$116.51 a barrel at 0703 GMT after settling 4.2 percent higher on Friday.

US West Texas Intermediate was at \$102.14 a barrel, up \$1.86, or 1.87 percent, following a 1.5 percent gain in the previous session.

"The market has all but discounted the prospect of a negotiated end to the war, Trump's claims of ongoing 'direct and indirect' talks with Iran notwithstanding, and is bracing for a sharp escalation in military hostilities, which is a bullish signal for crude, with huge uncertainties on the timing and nature of the outcome," said Vandana Hari, founder of oil market analysis provider Vanda Insights.

US President Donald Trump said the US and Iran have been meeting "directly and indirectly" and that Iran's new leaders have been "very reasonable", as more US troops arrived in the region, while the Israeli military said on Monday it is attacking the Iranian government's infrastructure throughout Tehran.

Brent has soared 59 percent this month, the steepest monthly jump, exceeding gains seen

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Foreign loan commitments rise, but disbursement slows

MD ASADUZ ZAMAN

Bangladesh secured higher foreign loan commitments in the first eight months of the current fiscal year, yet actual disbursement fell by 26 percent compared with the same period last year, raising concerns about the country's ability to use external funds effectively.

Between the July-February period, foreign loan disbursement dropped to \$3.05 billion, down from \$4.13 billion a year earlier, according to data released by the Economic Relations Division (ERD) yesterday.

The decline was driven largely by slower project aid, the primary channel for financing infrastructure and development projects.

Disbursement under project assistance fell to just above \$3 billion in the first eight months of this fiscal year, compared with over \$4.1 billion during the same period last year.

This slowdown comes despite nearly \$40 billion in financing commitments from foreign lenders.

Analysts say the widening gap between pledged funds and actual disbursement reflects Bangladesh's limited capacity to use external resources on time.

Foreign aid is crucial for roads, power plants, and social sector projects, but delays can reduce project benefits and increase costs.

The trend is particularly concerning as Bangladesh's external debt servicing rises. During the July-February period, the country paid \$2.9 billion in principal and interest, up from \$2.63 billion a year earlier.

Deen Islam, professor of economics at Dhaka University, said the figures indicate a gradual shift from development financing to debt rollover.

"When a large portion of new external borrowing is used to service existing debt rather than finance productive investment, the net inflow of resources into the economy declines," he said.

"Infrastructure and development spending may slow, while rising debt servicing puts additional pressure on foreign exchange reserves and the exchange rate," Islam said.

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WTO conference concludes without major agreements



REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

The 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14) of the World Trade Organization (WTO) concluded early yesterday with no significant agreements, except promises to continue working towards consensus on disputed issues among member countries.

The four-day conference, which began on March 26, saw nearly 2,000 officials, including more than 90 ministers, debate key topics such as the moratorium on customs duties for electronic transmissions and broader WTO reform.

Originally scheduled to end on Sunday, the meeting stretched past midnight as ministers tried to bridge gaps on major issues.

DEADLOCK ON E-COMMERCE MORATORIUM

The WTO's moratorium on customs duties for electronic transmissions expired yesterday after nearly three decades. Negotiations in Yaoundé continued late into the night but concluded without a final agreement.

Diplomats worked to reconcile differences between Brazil, which initially sought a two-year extension and later proposed a four-year extension with a mid-term review, and the United States, which pushed for a permanent moratorium to protect major companies such as Amazon and Apple from digital taxation.

A draft proposal for a four-year extension with a one-year sunset buffer, extending the moratorium to 2031, was also discussed but not agreed upon, reports Reuters.

Developing countries, including India, opposed a lengthy extension, arguing that the moratorium denies them potential tax revenue that could be reinvested domestically. Some 66 nations, however, agreed to an interim arrangement pending ratification.

WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala said, "The e-commerce moratorium had expired, meaning countries could apply duties on electronic goods such as digital downloads and streaming. But we hope to be able to restore the moratorium and Brazil and the US were trying to reach agreement on it. They need more time and we didn't have the

timelines and key issues, seen by Reuters, was close to agreement before the talks ended. Completion of any reform deal, however, will depend on resolving recurring issues, such as improving consensus-based decision-making and extending trade benefits to developing countries. Ministers also fell short of expectations on agriculture and other areas.

Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala welcomed progress in discussions on WTO reform, fisheries subsidies, and other issues.

KEY OUTCOMES

The WTO announced that ministers agreed to continue negotiations on

- The conference, which began on March 26, overran due to a deadlock
- The e-commerce duties moratorium expired
- Brazil and the US disagreed on the extension
- WTO reform talks made partial progress
- Two small decisions aided minor economies, trade rules
- Talks will continue in Geneva this May

time here."

Cameroon Trade Minister Luc Magloire Mbarga Atangana, chair of MC14, added that WTO talks would continue in Geneva, expected in May.

Britain's Business and Trade Secretary Peter Kyle called the failure to reach a collective decision in Yaoundé a "major setback for global trade."

REFORM TALKS MAKE PARTIAL PROGRESS

Ministers and delegates made some progress drafting a plan for broader WTO reform, though no final agreements were reached, reports AFP. They were tasked with creating an action plan to revitalise the organisation, weakened by geopolitical tensions, stalled negotiations, and rising protectionism.

A draft reform roadmap outlining

fisheries subsidies, aiming to present recommendations at the 15th Ministerial Conference for comprehensive rules.

Two decisions were also adopted that had been previously endorsed in Geneva: improving the integration of small economies into the multilateral trading system, and enhancing the implementation of special and differential treatment provisions under the Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) agreements.

The WTO director-general confirmed that members would return to Geneva with drafts of the Yaoundé Ministerial Declaration on WTO Reform and Work Plan, the Ministerial Decision on Electronic Commerce, the Ministerial Decision on TRIPS Non-Violation and Situation Complaints, and the LDC package.