

SME Baishakhi Fair begins in Dhaka

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The SME Foundation has, for the first time, organised a weeklong Baishakhi Fair to promote SME products, expand market access, and strengthen buyer linkages.

The week-long SME Baishakhi Fair began yesterday at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Center in Agargaon, Dhaka, and will run until April 18.

Anwar Hossain Chowdhury, managing director of the SME Foundation, said the fair was designed to bring together the rich heritage, culture, and festive spirit of Bengal, offering visitors a unique experience while making the celebration of the Bangla New Year more vibrant.

More than 150 stalls are participating in the fair, where SME entrepreneurs are showcasing and selling a wide range of products, including handicrafts, jute goods, ready-made garments and fashion accessories, agro-processed items, traditional and heritage products, prepared foods and

street food, jewellery, leather goods, as well as perfumes and lifestyle products.

Commerce, Industries, Textiles and Jute Minister Khandakar Abdul Muktadir has said the SME and MSME sectors together make up the backbone of the national economy.

He emphasised that a significant portion of Bangladesh's economy operates within the informal sector, where SMEs play a vital role.

A Tk 300 crore credit wholesaling programme has recently been introduced to support SME development, the minister stated. This funding is being disbursed through 15 banks and four financial institutions. He expressed optimism that the allocation could be increased to Tk 2,000 crore in the future.

The minister also highlighted that strengthening the SME sector can generate employment, diversify industrial production, and encourage broader participation in economic activities. Currently, the SME

sector contributes around 30 percent to Bangladesh's economy, according to the SME Foundation.

As per the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics Economic Survey 2024, nearly 99 percent of the country's approximately 11.8 million industrial establishments are classified as cottage, micro, small, and medium enterprises. These enterprises account for about 85 percent of total industrial employment.

With over 30 million people employed, the SME sector is a key driver of socio-economic development in Bangladesh. Given the country's large population and limited resources, the sector plays a critical role in job creation and overall economic progress, the commerce minister said.

Since its establishment in 2006 under the industries ministries, the SME Foundation has supported approximately 2.1 million entrepreneurs through various programmes, of whom around 60 percent are women.

No room for illusory budgeting

FROM PAGE B1

"Someone may be within the tax net but have little taxable income, while others with significant income remain under-taxed. That imbalance needs to be corrected."

He suggested exploring new areas of taxation, including property and inheritance taxes.

"In most developed economies, inheritance tax is used to address intergenerational inequality. You cannot tackle inequality by taxing income alone; asset inequality is far greater in our country," he said.

Asset recovery, particularly by bringing back stolen resources and making large defaulters pay, could also provide an additional source of revenue if pursued effectively, he added.

SHRINKING FISCAL SPACE

Debapriya warned that Bangladesh's fiscal space is narrowing, as operating expenditures continue to rise. The newly elected government will have to prudently consider the recommendations made by the National Pay Commission 2025 under the interim government.

"Salaries, subsidies, and interest payments are consuming revenue budget," he said.

"Debt stress is now emerging as a major macroeconomic challenge." Currently, the debt servicing liabilities of the government -- domestic and external -- are almost double the amount of total public expenditure for health and education.

He noted that public expectations from the new government remain high. Some early measures based on electoral commitments may appear to be populist in nature. However, these initiatives are being rolled out in phases and remain relatively contained in fiscal terms, he added.

URGENCY OF TAX REFORMS

Debapriya stressed that delays in tax administration reform, particularly within the NBR, could undermine domestic revenue mobilisation.

"If the reform process is not

completed quickly, especially the institutional restructuring, tax collection may suffer at a critical time," he warned.

He pointed out that both revenue collection and public expenditure will peak during the last quarter (April-June) of the current fiscal year.

"Reducing human interaction, minimising discretionary power, and ensuring transparency through digital systems are essential for improving efficiency and accountability," he said.

For Bangladesh, he concluded, the way forward lies in realism, discipline, and coherent policymaking.

"We often see policy contradictions -- where one measure offsets another. That reduces overall effectiveness," he said. Thus, there is a need for consistency and coordination.

"The opportunity is still there," he said. "But it is narrowing."

The policy expert urged the finance minister to adopt a pragmatic but structured approach to fiscal reform, stressing the need for policymakers to look beyond immediate pressures.

"My suggestion is simple: take the hard path, but place it within a medium-term budgetary framework -- a three-year horizon. That way, people can be assured that short-term difficulties will lead to longer-term stability," he said.

"You should not be overly concerned about what happens in just one year. The real focus should be on where the national economy would stand before the next national election, he observed.

Using an analogy, he explained the need for short-term restraint to enable long-term gains.

"If you want to make a long jump, you have to step back first, gather momentum, and then leap forward. This is that moment -- we may need to pull back now to create the space for consolidation and future growth."

STALLED CAPITAL MARKET REFORMS

8.23 percent.

The Wage Rate Index tracks wages of informal daily workers across 63 occupations in agriculture, industry and services.

To ease pressure, Prof Rahman called for targeted intervention. "The government should expand subsidised food distribution and increase compensation measures so low-income households can at least maintain minimum nutrition and purchasing power."

Bangladesh Bank reported a slight rise in nominal wage growth in the second quarter of fiscal year 2025-26, with the wage index increasing to 8.07 percent in December 2025 from 8.02 percent in September, although still below the previous fiscal year.

All major sectors saw marginal gains, with agriculture at 8.16 percent, industry at 7.91 percent and services at 8.24 percent, supported partly by Aman harvest demand. However, wage growth continued to lag inflation, keeping real wages negative and steadily eroding household purchasing power.

WAR SHOCKS COMPLICATE INCOME OUTLOOK FURTHER

Last week, the World Bank projected weaker economic growth for Bangladesh in the current fiscal year, saying an additional 12 lakh people will remain below the poverty line mainly due to the impact of the US-Israel war on Iran.

Before the conflict in the Middle East, about 17 lakh people were

Debapriya pointed to the long-standing proposal of offloading shares of multinational companies (MNCs), state-owned banks and enterprises (SOEs) to deepen the capital market.

"This idea dates back to the former finance minister Saifur Rahman's time, but implementation has been continuously aborted," he said.

The interim government also gave instructions to bring in shares of profitable SOEs and multinational companies to the capital market. The government and the MNCs each were to offload at least 5 percent of their shares. "But to no avail."

He attributed the failure to bureaucratic resistance, as officials often benefit from maintaining control over these entities. Offloading the shares would have given the capital market some positive vibes and, at the same time, generated some much-needed resources for the government.

On the expenditure side, he expressed concern over the effectiveness of public spending, particularly under the Annual Development Programme (ADP).

"Many projects are delayed, repeatedly revised, and suffer from poor feasibility studies," he said.

"Protracted land acquisition process and deficient project management, epitomised by inappropriate project directors, are also common." There are more than 1300 projects under the ADP, one-third of which are six to eleven years old.

He recommended forming a dedicated review body to weed out the "zombie projects" that have been continuing without meaningful progress.

"There is also a need to appoint skilled project directors and, where necessary, bring in professionals from outside the government," he added.

Improving the quality of spending, he noted, would increase public trust and tax compliance.

Inflation outpaces wages

FROM PAGE B1

The prof also pointed to sluggish public spending. "ADP implementation has been among the lowest in decades, cutting off an important source of income for workers," he added.

In its latest monthly update, the General Economics Division (GED) warned that rising energy and utility costs could further increase real income pressures as households face higher spending on electricity, gas and transport, disproportionately affecting lower-income groups.

"This divergence underscores intensifying real income pressures, as households face rising costs without corresponding wage adjustments," said the report.

It added that stagnant wages in this context highlight the erosion of purchasing power, particularly among lower-income groups whose spending is dominated by essentials.

The February assessment suggested inflationary pressures are rising faster than wage adjustments, widening the mismatch between incomes and expenditure.

"This identifies a need for coordinated wage and price management, as inflationary pressures continue to undermine real income stability," the report said.

In March, wage growth in agriculture stood at 8.10 percent, up 0.01 percentage points from February. Industrial wages rose to 8.02 percent, while services recorded

expected to move out of poverty this year. That figure has now dropped to 5 lakh.

At the \$3 international poverty line, an additional 14 lakh people are projected to fall into poverty over the same period, it added.

The Washington-based multilateral lender said the conflict is likely to affect Bangladesh's economy materially, compounding existing vulnerabilities, including high inflation, financial sector stress, limited policy space and weakened confidence.

Islamic banks'

FROM PAGE B1

The central bank said the Islamic banking system has been playing a significant role in mobilising deposits and financing in various economic activities in Bangladesh.

However, the number of rural branches of full-fledged Islamic banks has not grown in line with demand. "They may focus more on expanding their outreach into rural areas," it added.

The BB said Islamic banks may invest more in socially beneficial industries, particularly in agriculture and small businesses.

The central bank recommended that Islamic banks explore new customer bases in microfinance, support women entrepreneurs, and meet the financial needs of public agencies.



Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC)

Invitation for Enlistment

| | | |
|----------------------------------|---|--|
| 1 | Ministry / Division | Ministry of Power, Energy & Mineral Resources/ Energy and Mineral Resources Division |
| 2 | Agency | Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) |
| 3 | Procuring Entity Name | General Manager (Commercial and Operations) Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) |
| 4 | Procuring Entity District | Chattogram |
| 5 | Invitation for | Application for enlistment as a potential supplier for supply of Refined Petroleum Products on CIF basis. |
| 6 | Invitation Ref. No | 28.03.0000.000.045.01.0004.26 |
| 7 | Date: | 13 April, 2026 |
| KEY INFORMATION | | |
| 6 | Procurement Method | International RFQ |
| FUNDING INFORMATION | | |
| 7 | Source of Fund | Government of Bangladesh - GoB (Own Source) |
| PARTICULAR INFORMATION | | |
| 8 | Application Closing Date, Time | 04 May 2026, 04.00 PM (BST) |
| 9 | Name & Address of the Office | -Application form Availability Place: 1. Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation BSC Bhaban, Saltgola Road, Chattogram-4100 2. Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation Dhaka Liaison Office, BTMC Bhaban (10 th Floor) Karwan Bazar, Dhaka-1215 The Document will also be available at BPC's website (www.bpc.gov.bd). -Submission Place Applicants must submit their application physically or by courier. The applicant may submit their application through email (gm_commercial@bpc.gov.bd) also but in that case the applicant have to submit the hard copy of the application through courier or physically. Submission Address (for physical or courier): Place: Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation BSC Bhaban (2 nd Floor), Saltgola Road, Chattogram-4100, Bangladesh. |
| INFORMATION FOR APPLICANT | | |
| 10 | Brief Description of the Project/ Assignment. | Supply of Refined Petroleum Products as per specification (e.g. Gasoil 0.005% 'S'; Jet A-1; High Sulphur Furnace Oil (HSFO) 180 cSt, Gasoline 95 Unleaded, Marine Fuel 0.5% 'S', LPG etc.) mentioned in Master Sale and Purchase Agreement (MSPA) on Delivery at CIF basis to Main Installation of Oil Marketing Companies at Chattogram, Single Point Mooring (SPM) at Maheshkhali or any place in Bangladesh. |
| 11 | Eligibility for Supplier | Must comply with the minimum criteria mentioned on the Standard Application Document for Enlistment (SADE-1). |
| 12 | Other Details (if Applicable) | This is the Invitation for Enlistment of Refined Petroleum Products suppliers. Successful Enlisted Suppliers will be invited to sign Master Sale and Purchase Agreement (MSPA). |
| 13 | Supplier's Composition | The interested Refined Petroleum Products Suppliers may either be a single or or Joint Venture (JV) of more than one firm or as a consortium. |
| 14 | Application Fees | 1000.00 USD or 125,000.00 BDT |
| 15 | Enlistment Fees | 50.00 USD or 5000.00 BDT |
| 16 | Submission of Application & Enlistment Fees | The Application must be accompanied by a Pay Order or Wire Transfer bearing equal value of Application Fee which is non refundable. A/C Name: Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation A/C No.0102487000001 Bank Name: Sonali Bank Limited Address: Shahid Abrar Fahad Avenue Corporate Branch Branch - Postal Code: Dhaka-1000 Swift Code: BSONBDDHBB Routing Number: 200270764 After being selected, the successful applicants will have to submit the Enlistment Fee in favor of BPC before signing Master Sale and Purchase Agreement (MSPA). |
| PROCURING AGENCY DETAILS | | |
| 17 | Name of Official Inviting Application | Md. Murshed Hossain Azad |
| 18 | Designation of Official Inviting Application | General Manager (Commercial and Operations) |
| 19 | Address of Official Inviting the Application | Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation BSC Bhaban, Saltgola Road, Chattogram-4100 Bangladesh. |
| 20 | Contact details of Official Inviting the Application | Tel: +8802333316121 Fax: +8802333320147 E-mail: gm_commercial@bpc.gov.bd |
| 21 | Other Contacts | gm.com.bpc@gmail.com ; gm_com_bpc@yahoo.com |
| 22 | The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject any or all applications without assigning any reason. | |



Md. Murshed Hossain Azad
General Manager (Commercial & Operations)