



BSEC bans three audit firms, four auditors over audit failures

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC) has banned three audit firms and four auditors from auditing listed companies for several years after they failed to audit the financial reports of two listed firms properly.

In separate orders issued on April 23, the commission banned Mahfel Huq & Co Chartered Accountants, Ata Khan & Co Chartered Accountants, and Shiraz Khan Basak & Co Chartered Accountants. It also banned four auditors who are current or former partners of these firms.

The action comes amid long-standing criticism that auditors often go unpunished despite failing to detect irregularities in listed firms. As a result of inaccurate financial reporting, many investors were misled into buying shares and later suffered significant losses.

All three audit firms failed to properly audit the financial reports of Ring Shine Textiles for three separate years, according to BSEC.

During the pre-IPO period, Ring Shine Textiles distributed shares free of cost through a private offer, which was described as a clear act of forgery. The company also issued stock dividends to shareholders who had not paid for their shares. These allotments increased its paid-up capital without any actual money being received.

Later, in 2019, the company raised Tk 150 crore from the stock market to buy machinery and repay bank loans.

However, none of these irregularities was reported by the auditors.

MAHFEL HUQ & CO

Mahfel Huq & Co was banned for three years for failing to properly audit the financial statements of Ring Shine Textiles for the year which ended on June 30, 2018.

The audit did not provide reasonable assurance that the financial statements showed a true and fair view of the company's financial position and performance, as required under auditing and reporting standards.

An enquiry committee formed by the BSEC found major irregularities in key items such as assets, retained earnings, and net profit. It also found that the firm issued an unmodified audit opinion without obtaining sufficient and appropriate audit evidence.

As a result, BSEC barred the firm from auditing any listed securities for three years from the date of the order.

The firm was also banned for one year for failing to properly audit Fareast Islami Life Insurance for 2018. A special audit found material irregularities, inadequate disclosures, and deficiencies in the financial reports, leading to the suspension.

In addition, Md Abdus Sattar, a former partner of the firm, was prohibited from auditing any listed securities issuer for five years.

Md Abu Kaiser, another former partner, was barred for two years.

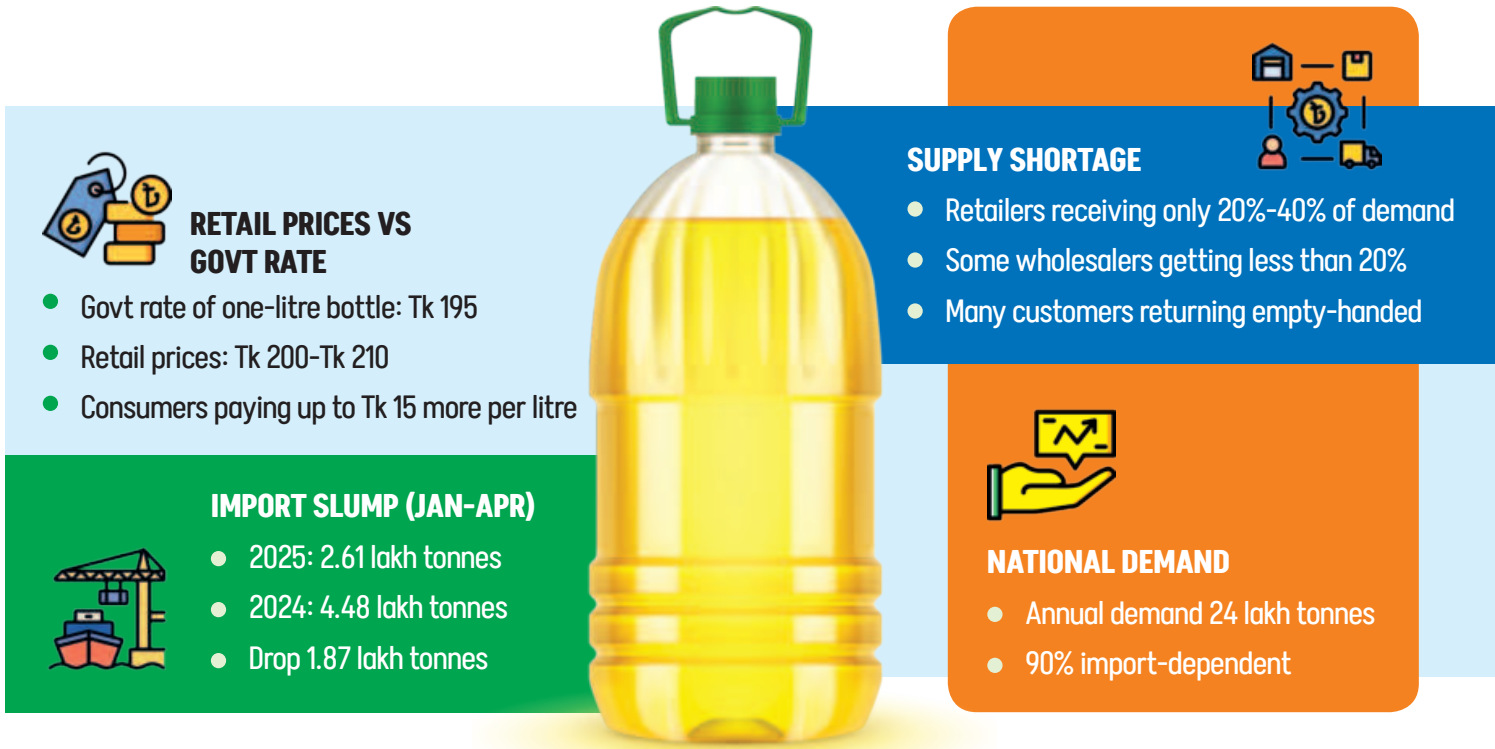
ATA KHAN & CO

Ata Khan & Co faced action after a BSEC inquiry committee found material irregularities and anomalies in key financial statement items, including the assets and net profit of Ring Shine Textiles for the year ended June 30, 2019.

READ MORE ON B3

Bottled soybean oil becomes scarce

Imports halve year-on-year, retailers receive under 40% supply, consumers pay up to Tk 15 above govt rate per litre



SUKANTA HALDER, MOHAMMAD SUMAN and DWOHA CHOWDHURY

A shortage of soybean oil that began in early March shows little sign of easing, pushing retail prices above the government fixed rate, with customers now paying up to Tk 15 more per litre.

The government has set the price of a one-litre bottle at Tk 195. However, retailers across the country are charging between Tk 200 and Tk 210.

Small shopkeepers, supermarket chains and wholesalers say they are receiving less than half of their usual daily demand for the cooking staple, most of which Bangladesh imports.

Refiners have not said clearly whether they have reduced supply. However, official data show soybean oil imports fell sharply in the January-April period compared with the same period last year.

Refiners say global prices and freight costs have increased, but authorities have yet to approve their proposal to raise local rates. They say it is no longer possible to import and sell the product at a loss.

Nurul Alam Sikder, a shopkeeper in Dhaka's Pallabi area, said he last received bottled

soybean oil from dealers about three weeks ago. Dealers are saying that there is a supply shortage, so they are unable to provide it.

Firoj Alam, manager of retail chain Daily Shopping, which has 115 outlets nationwide, said bottled soybean oil has not met demand since the beginning of April.

Currently, only about 30 percent to 40 percent of the required amount is being supplied, said Alam.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, a senior official at another supermarket chain said importers have failed to supply enough bottled soybean oil since the last week of February. At present, only 25 percent to 30 percent of the required supply is available.

The official said many customers are returning empty-handed when they come to buy oil. They are expressing frustration with them over not being able to get it.

Abu Bakar Siddique, an edible oil wholesaler at Karwan Bazar, one of Dhaka's largest kitchen markets, said the squeeze has also cut dealer commissions because the maximum retail price has not increased.

DEALERS CUT BACK SUPPLIES

During a visit to kitchen markets in Chattogram yesterday, it was found that 1 litre and 2 litre bottles were available at some

shops, while 3 litre and 5 litre bottles were largely missing from shelves.

Retailers were selling bottled soybean oil at Tk 5 to Tk 7 above the maximum retail price printed on the packaging. Traders say they are receiving less than 20 percent of their usual supply.

Abul Hashem, a retailer in the port city, said limited deliveries from distributors have disrupted sales and forced them to ration stock.

Hashem said retailers are not receiving edible oil in line with demand. Dealers said their commission has also been reduced.

"As a result, we are buying oil at Tk 1 to Tk 2 higher than the maximum retail price printed on the bottle. If we do not add at least Tk 5 per litre, we incur losses," he added.

In Sylhet, retailers reported a similar picture.

Ashis Das, a retailer at Bagbari area, said, "Dealers have stopped providing supplies for over a week. Wholesalers in Kalighat are also almost out of stock, so we are having to run our shops without oil."

Another retailer, Kapil Ray, said, "No company has provided oil for several days. We have managed to source small quantities of

READ MORE ON B3

Govt's heavy bank borrowing to curb private credit: BEA

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

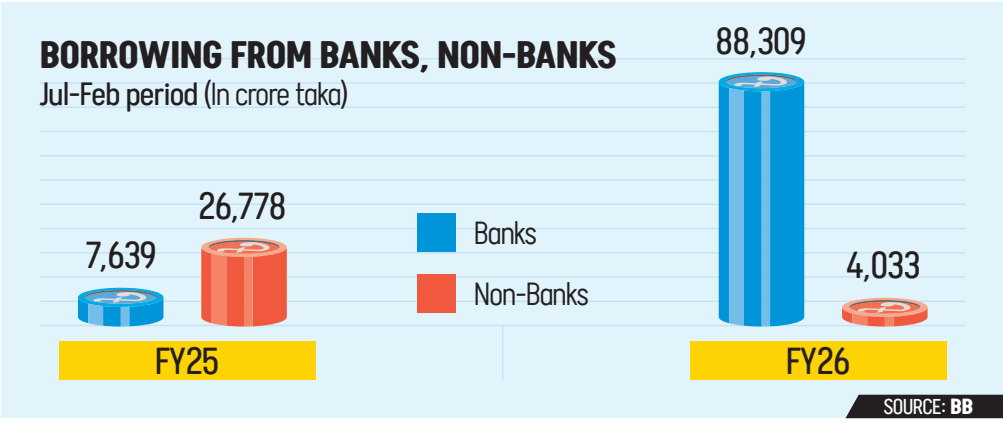
A widening revenue shortfall is driving the government toward heavy bank borrowing, raising concerns over tighter credit availability for the private sector and mounting fiscal pressure in the coming years, the Bangladesh Economic Association (BEA) said.

"If the revenue gap persists, the trend [of government bank borrowing] could deepen further in FY2026-27, amplifying a 'crowding out' effect where government demand for funds limits lending space for businesses," said the association.

The economists' body raised the issue yesterday during a pre-budget discussion with the National Board of Revenue (NBR) officials at its headquarters in Dhaka.

BEA estimates that government borrowing from banks may reach around Tk 1 lakh crore in FY26. The amount could rise to Tk 1.1 to 1.3 lakh crore in FY27, with the deficit remaining at 4.5 to 5 percent of GDP.

As of February in the current fiscal year,



SOURCE: BB

the government borrowed Tk 88,309 crore from the banking system and Tk 4,033 crore from non-banking sources, according to Bangladesh Bank data.

The BEA also said the upcoming budget will face pressure from political commitments, including pay-scale adjustments, family card

programmes, agricultural support, and social safety-net expansion.

"Ensuring food security and stabilising prices of essential goods will further strain fiscal space," said Mohammad Masud Alam, member of the BEA.

READ MORE ON B2

Exports demand-driven, no overcapacity Commerce minister says

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh's exports are order-based and free of overcapacity, Commerce Minister Khandakar Abdul Muktarir said yesterday amid an ongoing US investigation into forced labour and surplus production across 60 countries, including Bangladesh.

Speaking at a luncheon meeting on US-Bangladesh partnership hosted by the American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham) at the Sheraton in Dhaka, he also said Bangladesh has made substantial progress regarding labour rights.

The minister said Bangladesh's exports are driven by demand. Particularly, the garment industry produces strictly against international orders. "This is indicative of global demand, rather than excess capacity."

He pointed out that many factories are currently running below capacity due to energy and infrastructure constraints.

On forced labour, the minister mentioned that Bangladesh has enacted reforms in workplace safety and labour rights in partnership with the International Labour Organization (ILO) and other partners, establishing one of the most rigorously regulated and secure garment sectors in the world.

Stating that Bangladesh is committed to maintaining international labour standards, he said the government believes that the most constructive course of action to that end is continuing engagement and collaboration.

On partnership with the US, the minister said the government is confident that the bilateral relationship will continue to grow through trade, increased investment, technology collaboration, and continued dialogue.

He said the government is diversifying its export base by incorporating sectors such as pharmaceuticals, leather, agro-products, and light engineering, in addition to a booming ICT sector.

The minister stated that improving market access is imperative as the country is set to graduate from the least developed country status. "We look forward to continued US assistance to guarantee a seamless transition and maintain our global competitiveness."

He noted that although Bangladesh has established robust manufacturing capabilities

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Gas price hike fuels energy inflation: BB

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh witnessed a spike in energy inflation during the January-March quarter of the current fiscal year 2025-26 (FY26), driven by gas price hikes, according to Bangladesh Bank (BB) report published yesterday.

Energy inflation rose to 14.9 percent in the third quarter of FY26 from 14.4 percent in the previous quarter, the central bank said in its report titled Inflation Dynamics in Bangladesh.

The report said solid fuels such as firewood, agricultural by-products, cow dung, and jute sticks have consistently been a major driver of energy inflation.

However, inflation of solid fuels declined to 21.5 percent in the January-March period from 23.1 percent in the previous quarter. Gas inflation surged to 11.3 percent in the third quarter, rebounding from a 6.2 percent

inflation in the preceding quarter.

During the January-March period of FY26, inflation averaged 8.81 percent, up from 8.3 percent in the preceding October-December quarter, mainly driven by increased food prices, especially vegetables and spices.

Solid fuels such as firewood, agricultural by-products, cow dung, and jute sticks have consistently been a major driver of energy inflation

However, protein-based foods remained the top contributor, accounting for 44.6 percent of overall food inflation, the report said.

The average contribution of vegetables to food inflation rose to 22.7 percent in the January-March period of this year. The

contribution of cereal items to food inflation saw a notable decline, dropping to 8.1 percent from 41.4 percent in the previous quarter.

In contrast, non-food inflation remained broadly stable at a high level of approximately 8.9 percent.

During the quarter, the BB report said that the contribution of domestic items to inflation increased to 71.7 percent, while the share of import-concentrated items fell to 28.3 percent.

Despite a spike in inflation, the wage-price gap slightly narrowed compared to the previous quarter. "This narrowing was primarily driven by a decline in headline inflation rather than any significant improvement in wage growth," the report said.

"Despite some positive momentum effects, wage growth remained sluggish throughout the quarter, as the negative base effect persisted," it added.



BB eases incentive bonus rules for bank staff

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh Bank has eased rules for banks to award incentive bonuses to staff, provided that a few criteria are met.

According to a central bank circular issued yesterday, a bank's boards of directors may approve up to one month's basic salary as a bonus in recognition of "special achievements" during the year, even if the usual eligibility criteria are not met.

However, this discretionary payment will only be permitted if the institution records an operating profit. In

Banks may approve up to one month's basic salary as a bonus in recognition of "special achievements" during the year, even if the usual eligibility criteria are not met

addition, the bank must ensure that regulatory capital is maintained at least at the previous year's level (excluding adjustments for deferred provisions approved by Bangladesh Bank) and that no fresh applications are made for deferred provisioning facilities.

Officials said the move aims to boost morale among officers and employees while preserving competitiveness in the banking sector. Meanwhile, Bangladesh Bank stressed that compliance with the outlined conditions is essential to ensure financial discipline and safeguard stability.

ACI, Shanghai Aiko Solar team up to boost renewable energy

STAR BUSINESS DESK

ACI Renewable Energy has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Shanghai Aiko Solar Co Ltd, a globally recognised solar technology company, to promote renewable energy solutions in Bangladesh.

Asif Uddin, chief business officer of ACI Motors Limited, and Imran Akram, regional director for South Asia at the solar technology company, signed the MoU at the Yamaha Flagship Centre in Dhaka on Monday, according to a press release. Shanghai Aiko Solar Co Ltd is known

for its strong international presence and high-efficiency solar modules powered by advanced N-type ABC technology.

The partnership reflects a shared commitment to delivering efficient and sustainable solar energy solutions in Bangladesh, the release added.

Asif Faisal Rumi, deputy business director of the automobile company; Tanvir Ahmed Tanim, assistant marketing manager; and Md Nur Alam, country manager for Bangladesh, along with other senior officials from both organisations, were also present at the event.



Imran Akram, regional director for South Asia at Shanghai Aiko Solar Co Limited, and Asif Uddin, chief business officer of ACI Motors Limited, pose for a photograph after signing the memorandum of understanding at Yamaha Flagship Centre in Dhaka on Monday.

PHOTO: ACI

Ziaul Hasan Molla made AMD of Bank Asia

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Bank Asia PLC has promoted Mohammad Ziaul Hasan Molla to the post of additional managing director (AMD) in recognition of his significant contributions and long-standing service to the bank.



Ziaul Hasan Molla

Prior to his promotion, Molla had been serving as deputy managing director since 2018, according to a press release. He will continue to hold key responsibilities, including chief credit officer (CCO), head of agent banking, chief anti-money laundering compliance officer (CAMECO), and executive director of Bank Asia Foundation.

With over 25 years of experience in banking and financial services, he brings extensive expertise across credit, corporate, SME and retail banking, Islamic banking, and financial inclusion.

Molla joined Bank Asia PLC in 2013 and has since played a vital role in the bank's growth, particularly in business development, credit, compliance, and agent banking.

He previously worked at City Bank PLC and Standard Chartered Bank, and also served as CEO of a Hong Kong-based financial institution.

He is currently serving as the chairman of the Association of Anti-Money Laundering Compliance Officers of Banks in Bangladesh for the 2022-2026 term, promoting best practices across the country's banking industry.

Molla obtained his master's degree in finance from the University of Dhaka and an MBA from Newport University, US.



Chief of Army Staff General Waker-Uz-Zaman, also chairman of Trust Bank PLC, attends the launch of UnionPay debit and credit cards at a hotel in Dhaka recently. Ahsan Zaman Chowdhury, managing director and CEO of the bank, was also present at the event.

PHOTO: TRUST BANK

Trust Bank rolls out UnionPay debit, credit cards

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Trust Bank PLC has launched UnionPay debit and credit cards at a programme held at a hotel in Dhaka recently.

Chief of Army Staff General Waker-Uz-Zaman, also chairman of the bank, inaugurated the cards as the chief guest, according to a press release.

The launch marks a milestone in expanding the bank's global payment solutions and enhancing customer benefits.

The cards will allow Bangladeshi customers to access UnionPay's global network both at home and abroad, offering seamless international

transactions, medical and tuition payments, airport lounge access, and other lifestyle privileges.

At the event, the army chief said the partnership with UnionPay International would ensure advanced and secure banking services aligned with the digital era.

The cards are expected to facilitate globally accepted financial transactions for a wide range of users, including students, patients, and businesspeople.

The bank said the initiative reflects its commitment to innovation, customer-centric services, and the growth of digital banking.

Premier Bank holds town hall meetings in Cumilla, Sylhet

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Premier Bank PLC recently organised "Town Hall Meetings" in Cumilla and Sylhet, respectively, as part of the ongoing "Deposit and Recovery Month 2026".

Md Monzur Mofiz, managing director of the bank, inaugurated the programme in Cumilla as the chief guest, according to a press release.

M Wali Ul Morshed, deputy managing director; Mohammad Shamim Murshed, senior executive vice-president and head of consumer banking; and Mohammad Anwar Hossain, senior executive vice-president and head of recovery, along with employees of the concerned branches, also participated in the meeting.

At the Sylhet town hall meeting, Amalendu Roy, deputy managing director of the bank, attended the event as the chief guest. Asif Khan, senior executive vice-president and head of SME and agri banking of the bank, attended the programme as a special guest.



PHOTO: PREMIER BANK

Md Monzur Mofiz, managing director of Premier Bank PLC, poses for a group photograph with participants of the "Town Hall Meeting 2026" in Cumilla recently.

Jamuna Bank leads student banking conference in Naogaon

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Jamuna Bank PLC led a "Student Banking Conference-2026" held at the Naogaon Sadar Upazila Parishad Auditorium in Naogaon, aimed at fostering savings habits and promoting financial literacy among students.

All scheduled banks operating in the Naogaon district participated in the daylong conference.

Md Iqbal Mohasin, director of the Financial Inclusion Department at Bangladesh Bank, inaugurated the programme as the chief guest, according to a press release.

In his speech, Mohasin emphasised that introducing students to modern banking services and financial management

is crucial for building a self-reliant Bangladesh.

Mirza Elias Uddin Ahmed, managing director and CEO of Jamuna Bank PLC, presided over the conference. He highlighted the long-term benefits of student banking and reiterated the bank's commitment to bringing students under the umbrella of formal financial services.

A large number of students from various educational institutions in Naogaon, along with teachers and senior officials from different banks, attended the conference.

Abeda Rahim, additional director of the Financial Inclusion Department of Bangladesh Bank; Tania Bhuiyan, deputy director; and Abdus Sobhan, head of the banking operations division at Jamuna Bank PLC, were also present.



Md Iqbal Mohasin, director of the Financial Inclusion Department at Bangladesh Bank, attends the "Student Banking Conference-2026", led by Jamuna Bank PLC, at the Naogaon Sadar Upazila Parishad Auditorium recently.

PHOTO: JAMUNA BANK

Govt's heavy bank borrowing

FROM PAGE B1

He also warned that global energy market volatility, especially rising tensions in the Middle East, could push up oil prices, increase import costs, and add pressure on foreign exchange reserves, posing additional risks to macroeconomic stability.

Speaking about raising revenue, he suggested urgently designing a comprehensive framework to bring Bangladesh's fast growing digital economy under the tax net to boost the country's tax-to-GDP ratio.

At the event, Mahbub Ullah, convener of the BEA, said the NBR should take stronger action against tax evasion in the real estate sector, in cases of wealth tax, and cases

of underreporting family and personal wealth.

In response, NBR chairman Md Abdur Rahman Khan said they are working on this issue.

Ahad Al Azad Munem, research associate of the Policy Research Institute (PRI) of Bangladesh, said that currently, about 28 percent of total revenue comes from customs or trade taxes.

"Such a high dependence on trade taxes is not considered international best practice."

The NBR chairman said that since the country's overall revenue collection is low, whenever any reform or change is proposed in major revenue sources, the decision-makers become hesitant.

"This reality must be acknowledged."

The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) urged the NBR to ensure tax justice, protect low-income groups, and take stronger measures to prevent tax evasion.

The Anti-Tobacco Media Alliance (ATMA) has proposed merging the lower and medium cigarette tiers and setting the price of a 10-stick pack at Tk 100, Tk 150 for the higher tier, and Tk 200 for the premium category.

It also recommended adding a specific excise duty of Tk 4 per pack. According to their proposal, this could generate around Tk 44,000 crore in additional revenue compared to the current fiscal

year and potentially prevent nearly 400,000 premature deaths in the long term.

Business Initiative Leading Development (BUILD) proposed that the government provide clear direction about the separation of the tax policy and tax administration.

Besides, the NBR should look into the gap between the registered companies and actual return submission numbers, it said.

The Bangladesh Society for the Change and Advocacy Nexus (B-SCAN), a volunteer organisation, demanded raising the tax-free income for differently abled people to up to Tk 6 lakh from the existing Tk 5 lakh.

Jalalabad Gas Transmission & Distribution System Ltd.
(A Company of Petrobangla)
(Gas Bhaban, Mendibag, Sylhet-3100)

গ্যাস ব্যবহারে সশ্রী হোন এবং সময়মত গ্যাস বিল পরিশোধ করুন

বিনা কারণে গ্যাসের চুলা জ্বালিয়ে রাখা আর বিপদকে ডাকা একই বিষয়

Ref.No: 28.16.9100.097.07.002.26/250Date: 28-04-2026

e-Tender Notice

This is to notify all concerned that the following National Tender published through the National e-GP portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) as stated below:

SL. No.	Tender ID, Package No& Tender Publication Date	Description of Goods	Tender Document Last Selling Date & Time	Tender Closing Date & Time	Tender Opening Date & Time
01.	Tender ID: 1261975 Reference No: 28.16.9100.097.07.002.26/4 Tender Publication Date: 28 April 2026	Procurement of Stationary and Cleaning Materials	10-May-2026 Time: 15:00	11-May-2026 Time: 15:00	11-May-2026 Time: 15:00

The interested Tenderer may Visit the web site <http://www.eprocure.gov.bd> to get the detailed tender notice and to purchase the tender document.

This is an OTM tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the national e-GP portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, Registration in the National e-GP portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required.

Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System portal/e-GP help desk: helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd

(Engr. Md. Masud Rana)
Deputy General Manager (Procurement)
E-mail: dgm_procurement@jgtdsl.gov.bd

GD-939

Jalalabad Gas Transmission & Distribution System Ltd.
(A Company of Petrobangla)
(Gas Bhaban, Mendibag, Sylhet-3100)

গ্যাস ব্যবহারে সশ্রী হোন এবং সময়মত গ্যাস বিল পরিশোধ করুন

বিনা কারণে গ্যাসের চুলা জ্বালিয়ে রাখা আর বিপদকে ডাকা একই বিষয়

Reference No.: 28.16.9100.119.71.002.26.02Dated: 23 April, 2026

e-Tender Notice

This is to notify all concern that the following tender have published through National e-GP portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>).

Sl No.	Tender ID, Package No. & Date of Publishing	Name of the Work	Tender Last Selling and Closing Date & Time
01.	Tender ID: 1252743 Package No: e-GP-CP-023 Date of Publishing : 23/04/2026	Gas Leakage Detection, GIS Mapping and Leak Repair / Maintenance Works of Gas Pipeline for 400 km Gas Pipeline Route at JGTDSL Franchise Area (2nd Phase).	Last Selling: 06-May-2026, 14:30 Closing date & time: 06-May-2026,15:30 Opening date & time: 06-May-2026,15:30

The interested persons/firms may visit the website <http://www.eprocure.gov.bd> to get the details of the tender.

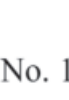
This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the national e-GP portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, Registration in the National e-GP portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required.

Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP system portal/e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

(ENGR. MOHAMMAD SARWAR JAHAN MAHMUD)
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GD-933

Apex Footwear profit rises 10% in Q3



Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Bangladesh Police
Office of the Superintendent of Police
Rajbari

Mamo No. 1303/E

Date: 28-04-2026

Tender Notice No. 07/2025-2026 (OTM)

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

SI No.	Package No.	Tender ID No.	Publication date	Tender last selling (date & time)	Tender closing & opening (date & time)
1	Repair and renovation works of drain lines and soak-wells around male barrack building and mess at Police Lines, Rajbari.	1266816	28-04-2026 14.00	12-05-2026 16.00	13-05-2026 13.00

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

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Oil prices rise 3%

REUTERS, London

Oil prices rose nearly 3 percent on Tuesday, extending the previous session's gains, as efforts to end the US-Iran war appeared to have stalled, with the crucial Strait of Hormuz waterway still mainly shut, starving markets of key Middle East energy supply.

Brent crude futures for June climbed \$2.99, or 2.76 percent, to \$111.22 a barrel by 0758 GMT, after gaining 2.8 percent to close the previous session at its highest since April 7. The contract is up for a seventh straight day.

At their intra-day peak on Tuesday, Brent was up 3.4 percent on the day at \$111.86 a barrel.

US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude for June rose \$2.54, or 2.64 percent, to \$98.91 a barrel, after gaining 2.1 percent in the previous session.

US President Donald Trump is unhappy with the latest Iranian proposal to end the war, a US official said on Monday, as Iranian sources disclosed that it avoided addressing the nuclear program until hostilities cease and Gulf shipping disputes are resolved.

Trump's displeasure with the offer leaves the conflict deadlocked, with Iran shutting shipping flows through the Strait of Hormuz, a conduit for about 20 percent of global oil and gas supplies, and the US retaining its blockade of Iranian ports.

Thailand projects fewer tourists due to war

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's economic growth and tourist arrivals are forecast to drop this year as the Middle East war roils global energy prices, the finance ministry said Tuesday.

The country's GDP growth is projected to dip to 1.6 percent, the ministry said in a statement, down from 2.4 percent in 2025.

Growth in the Southeast Asian nation is anaemic, with the tourism sector vital but arrivals yet to return to their pre-Covid highs.

The government said in February that this year's growth forecast was between 1.5 to 2.5 percent.

Thailand expects about 33.5 million foreign tourists this year, about two million fewer than previously estimated, the ministry said on Tuesday.

Tourists from Europe and the Middle East have declined as a result of the US-Israeli war against Iran, which began two months ago and has driven up fuel prices, the ministry added.

CEMENT SECTOR UNDER COST PRESSURE

SUPPLY DISRUPTION

- War disrupts Middle East supply routes
- Clinker sourcing shifts to China, Vietnam, Thailand
- Import costs rise on tight supply, higher prices

IMPORT COST SURGE

- Clinker: \$42-\$43 → \$53/tonne (up to \$57-\$58)
- Slag: \$16 → \$23-\$24/tonne

FREIGHT & SHIPPING SHOCK

- Strait of Hormuz disruption slows shipping
- Fuel, insurance, war-risk premiums surge
- Shipping costs nearly doubled

OUTLOOK

Firms operating at losses, expecting recovery

Industry warns situation unsustainable



DOMESTIC MARKET STRAIN

- Cement price up Tk 30-50 per bag
- Actual cost increase Tk 70-80 per bag
- Weak demand limits pass-through

Cement makers under strain as war drives up input costs

Forced to import key raw materials from Asian countries at higher prices

JAGARAN CHAKMA

Cement manufacturers in the country are under growing pressure as the US-Israel war on Iran disrupts Middle Eastern supply routes, forcing them to import key raw materials – especially clinker – from Asian countries at higher prices.

The conflict has also increased freight costs, further raising overall import expenses. At the same time, weak domestic demand is preventing producers from passing on higher costs to consumers, leaving manufacturers squeezed between rising input costs and a fragile market.

The situation also highlights the sector's heavy dependence on imported raw materials. Key inputs such as clinker, limestone, granulated slag, fly ash and gypsum are largely imported. Nearly 90 percent of clinker is brought from abroad.

"Bangladesh's cement sector is under new cost pressure as clinker imports shift away from the Middle East," said Mohammad Iqbal Chowdhury, chief executive officer of LafargeHolcim Bangladesh PLC.

"Earlier, imports were largely sourced from Gulf countries at competitive prices, but that advantage has now disappeared. The country is now increasingly relying on China, Vietnam and Thailand, where clinker is being imported at higher prices," he added.

Chowdhury said the shift is linked to a widening geopolitical crisis following joint US-Israel strikes on Iran and Iran's closure of the Strait of Hormuz, a key global trade route.

"This has cut shipping traffic, pushed up freight and insurance costs, increased

logistics risks and war-risk premiums, and forced rerouting of shipments," he said.

"The impact on Bangladesh's cement industry has been immediate, as it depends heavily on imported clinker and stone aggregates."

He added that clinker import costs have risen from about \$42 to \$43 per tonne to nearly \$53 due to tighter supply and higher freight charges.

"With demand already weak, companies are struggling to pass on these costs, putting pressure on profit margins and forcing them to cut spending," he said.



Md Abul Mansur, general manager of Royal Cement Ltd, echoed these concerns. "Sourcing raw materials has become increasingly difficult due to global disruptions. Clinker is no longer coming from the Middle East, while gypsum and limestone from Oman now face sharply higher freight costs," he said.

He added, "Clinker prices have risen from around \$43 per tonne to about \$57 to \$58 per tonne, while slag prices have increased from \$16 to around \$23 to \$24 per tonne, driven by war-

related disruptions in global shipping."

Mansur linked the surge in freight costs to higher oil prices, increased insurance premiums and greater risks on maritime routes, saying shipping costs have effectively doubled.

He said the impact is already visible in the domestic market. Cement prices have increased by Tk 30 to Tk 50 per bag, even though actual costs have gone up by Tk 70 to Tk 80. Weak demand has prevented companies from passing on the full increase. "Costs are rising, but the market is unable to absorb the full impact," he added.

He also noted that construction activity has slowed as developers delay projects in hopes of greater stability, further affecting the industry.

The country's broader construction sector is also under strain due to weak public spending, subdued private investment, policy uncertainty and rising costs. These factors have already dampened project approvals, demand and growth across real estate and related industries, including cement.

Mohammed Amirul Haque, president of the Bangladesh Cement Manufacturers Association and managing director of Premier Cement Mills PLC, said the sector has faced multiple shocks over the past five years, making business difficult.

He added that many companies are still operating despite losses in the hope of recovery, but warned that this situation is not sustainable.

He stressed the need for a profit margin and cautioned that sharp price increases could harm the market.

"A quick recovery is unlikely," he added.

A multimodal future for Dhaka-Chattogram corridor

MASUD KHAN

The Dhaka-Chattogram corridor is the economic spine of Bangladesh, linking the capital with its principal seaport and carrying most industrial output, trade cargo and passenger traffic. A large share of export-import activity depends on this single axis, making its efficiency vital to national competitiveness. Yet this artery remains under severe strain. Congestion, unplanned roadside development and inadequate capacity have turned what should be a high-efficiency logistics route into a persistent bottleneck.

Much of the highway still operates as a four-lane road without proper service lanes, forcing long-distance freight to mix with local and slow-moving traffic. Rickshaws, vans and other low-speed vehicles reduce average speeds and raise accident risks. The alignment through bazaars and densely populated areas creates frequent chokepoints, further undermining fuel efficiency and reliability. Any meaningful upgrade must begin with strict access control and safety enforcement. Slow-moving vehicles should be barred from the main carriageway and diverted to parallel service roads. Continuous median barriers are needed to prevent unsafe pedestrian crossings, while guardrails can limit encroachment by local traffic. Properly designed entry and exit points are equally important to avoid random access. Without such discipline, even expanded capacity will not deliver lasting gains in travel time or safety.

Policy has rightly shifted towards strengthening rail connectivity along the corridor. Rail is inherently more efficient for long-haul cargo. Investments in gauge unification, improved signalling, and increased train frequency could significantly boost throughput while cutting transit times. However, rail alone cannot meet the corridor's needs. Its weakness lies in first and last-mile connectivity. Most cargo still requires trucking to and from rail terminals, often involving multiple handling stages. Without efficient inland container depots, automated handling systems and reliable scheduling, these transfers can erode rail's cost advantage and

reduce its appeal.

Large-scale infrastructure choices must therefore be weighed carefully. Earlier studies suggested that a Dhaka-Chattogram expressway would cost several billion dollars. A fully elevated corridor spanning more than 200 kilometres would multiply that figure. For comparison, the Dhaka Elevated Expressway, just over 20 kilometres long, cost more than \$1 billion. Extending such a model across the entire corridor would likely prove prohibitively expensive and difficult to sustain through toll revenues. A more viable path lies in targeted, high-impact investments: bypasses around major urban centres, service lanes to separate local traffic, and grade-separated interchanges at key junctions. Selective elevated sections may still be justified in land-constrained areas.

Rail investment also promises strong long-term returns. A modernised rail corridor can shift a substantial share of container traffic away from roads. That is crucial. An often overlooked but promising component is inland water transport. Bangladesh's vast river network provides a natural, low-cost option for bulk cargo. Improving navigability, upgrading river ports and linking waterways with road and rail systems would add resilience and flexibility to the logistics chain. Compared with road or rail megaprojects, river transport requires relatively modest investment yet can deliver substantial gains, especially for non-time-sensitive goods.

This makes a multimodal strategy essential. A modern Dhaka-Chattogram corridor should function as a coordinated system: rail for long-haul freight, road for distribution and time-sensitive delivery, and waterways for cost-effective bulk transport. Supporting infrastructure, including logistics hubs, intermodal terminals and digital tracking systems, will be critical to ensure seamless connectivity. Bangladesh now faces a strategic choice. A balanced multimodal approach combining rail modernisation, disciplined highway management and expanded river transport offers a more sustainable and cost-effective path. Given the corridor's central role in the economy, getting this right is not merely an infrastructure challenge. It is a national priority.

The writer is the chairman of Unilever Consumer Care Ltd

Less than 30% of oil wells active in Venezuela

AFP, Caracas

Less than 30 percent of Venezuela's oil wells are currently active, a trade group said during a forum Monday, with production hovering around 1 million barrels per day.

Current production is far below the 3 million barrels a day that Caracas was cashing in on two decades ago, with only 8,491 crude oil wells active of 30,722 wells overall, according to the Venezuelan Petroleum Chamber (CPV).

Despite Venezuela holding the world's largest crude oil reserves, years of corruption, underinvestment and mismanagement in the country have been compounded by US sanctions, leading to the epic collapse in production.

Monday's event was attended by US government officials, including United States charge d'affaires John Barrett, as Washington pushes to restore oil production since ousting leftist president Nicolas Maduro in January.

Barrett noted that the private sector, and US companies in particular, will be "the engine of Venezuela's transformation into a global energy hub."

CPV president Enrique Novoa called on Washington to fully remove sanctions because it is "what the Venezuelan people deserve as a society." Novoa added that multinational energy firms like Chevron and Spain's Repsol are moving forward with projects in Venezuela.

Venezuela's interim president Delcy Rodriguez, who governs under heavy pressure from Washington, has already pushed through reforms to hydrocarbons and mining laws, opening the door to private investors, both foreign and domestic.

Jovanny Martinez, executive vice president of Venezuela's state oil company PDVSA, said more than 3,464 wells have been reactivated.

Budget airlines first to cut flights as jet fuel prices soar

AFP, Paris

Ryanair, Transavia, Volotea and other low-cost airlines are feeling the financial pain from high jet fuel prices as a result of the Middle East war and are cutting flights.

The closure of the Strait of Hormuz has taken a huge chunk of oil supplies off the market, sending the price of jet fuel soaring and triggering fears of shortages that could force airlines to cancel flights.

Airlines aren't waiting for a lack of supplies to react.

"Travel alert: airlines are cutting thousands of flights right now," Travel Therapy TV host Karen Schaler said in an Instagram reel this past weekend. "Book early."

That advice would win the approval of Ryanair boss Michael O'Leary, who expressed concern earlier this month that fears of fuel shortages were making people put off booking flights.

Low cost carriers – which control a little more than a third of the global market, according to various estimates – are feeling the pinch first due to the nature of their business model.

With cheaper tickets, they have less capacity to absorb the rise in fuel costs.

Some of the cancellations may be the normal adjustments airlines tend to make

when demand doesn't meet expectations on certain routes.

"It is not unusual for carriers to adjust their schedules at this time of the year," financial analyst Dudley Shanley at investment bank Goodbody told AFP.

But "if jet fuel prices remain at this

level, there will have to be a little bit more trimming for low-cost airlines", he added.

If before the war airlines were able to maintain marginally profitable routes or even unprofitable routes, the surge in jet fuel prices will force them to make difficult choices.



AirAsia planes are seen parked at Kuala Lumpur International Airport 2 in Sepang. The Southeast Asia's largest low-cost carrier announced on Friday that it was cutting more flights and even some connections.

PHOTO: REUTERS/FILE