

US TRADE DEAL A partnership for greater bilateral trade

Says US envoy to Dhaka

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

US Ambassador to Dhaka Brent T Christensen yesterday dubbed the recently signed Agreement on Reciprocal Trade (ART) between Bangladesh and the Trump administration a genuine partnership that will create opportunities for more trade and investment for both nations.



Brent T Christensen

The US envoy made the remarks while speaking at a discussion on commercial and economic policy during the AmCham High-Level Luncheon and Policy Dialogue at the Sheraton Dhaka, attended by the commerce minister, diplomats, business leaders, academics and experts.

On the ART, the ambassador said it is a policy that emphasises trade over aid, investment over assistance, and a genuine partnership that creates opportunities for both countries.

Noting an enormous potential of bilateral trade, he called this moment an extraordinary opportunity for Bangladesh.

Christensen expressed hope that if fully embraced and executed, the ART could propel not only trade between the two countries but also Bangladesh's economic development to new levels.

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From left... DG of Directorate General of Drug Administration Maj Gen Shameem Haidar; Prof Farid Uddin; President of Diabetic Association of Bangladesh and National Prof AK Azad Khan; Danish Ambassador Christian Brix Møller; Transcom Ltd CEO Simeen Rahman; Health Minister Sardar Md Sakhawat Husain; MD of Novo Nordisk Bangladesh Riad Mamun Prodhani; Senior Vice-President (Asia Pacific) of Novo Nordisk Jay Thyagarajan; and Director of BIRDEM Academy Prof Md Faruque Pathan pose for a photo at the launch of modern penfill cartridges, being produced locally by Eskayef Pharmaceuticals Ltd in partnership with Danish company Novo Nordisk.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF PROTHOM ALO

Digital laws still pose risks to free speech, privacy

Say speakers at conference

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The digital laws recently passed by parliament pose risks to freedom of expression and privacy, said speakers at a conference yesterday, stressing that each law needs to be reviewed to safeguard rights.

At the event titled, "Digital Rights Asia-Pacific (DAPAC) Bangladesh National Conference 2026", they pointed out that the laws were passed hastily without stakeholder consultation, and these have retained several provisions that allow extensive digital surveillance, creating a scope for misuse.

Digitally Right and EngageMedia, which work on internet rights, organised the event at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre with the theme "Meaningful, Inclusive Lawmaking." Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) and development organisation D-Net joined as session partners.

During his speech, TIB Executive Director Itekhazur Rahman expressed concern over several provisions in the recently passed Cyber Security Act, Bangladesh Telecommunication (Amendment) Ordinance, Personal Data Protection Ordinance, and National Data Management Ordinance.

He said the new laws contain inconsistencies and contradict both the spirit of July and the electoral pledges of parties represented in parliament.

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Teknaf to Tentulia economic corridor on horizon

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In its 51-point election manifesto, the BNP pledged to reduce population density in Dhaka by enhancing services in districts and upazilas and by strengthening local governments.

Once operational, the corridor could raise Bangladesh's GDP growth by two percentage points on average and generate 10 million jobs within a decade and help reduce poverty for around 12 million people.

ADB began study for the plan last year, when reform initiatives by the interim government across several sectors were gaining momentum.

The Manila-based multilateral lender submitted the draft report soon after the current government assumed office, while the final report is expected next month, according to officials.

Earlier this month, the draft proposal was handed over to Finance Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury, who placed it before Prime Minister Tarique Rahman on Sunday.

Tarique gave the green light to the ADB's plan with some directives, The Daily Star has learnt from people involved with the proceedings.

The proposal includes investments to upgrade existing roads, railways and waterways along the corridor, alongside projects in education, healthcare, energy and power.

It envisions land-based LNG terminals and gas exploration initiatives. The other components include multimodal transport hubs, port development and digital connectivity.

According to the draft, infrastructure would be developed to support small and medium enterprises (SMEs) within urban areas across the 100-kilometre belt.

Existing roads, rail lines and inland

water terminals would be modernised, while new facilities would be built to ensure smoother transportation of goods.

Digital connectivity projects would also be undertaken to support the growth of ICT-related businesses.

Key infrastructure investments include upgrades to Mongla Port in Khulna, Benapole Port in Jashore and Sheola Land Port in Sylhet to strengthen connectivity and trade facilitation.

Areas along the Naf River and the Sabrang area in Teknaf upazila would be developed as special tourism zones.

Tarique called for special support for farmers and SMEs in northern Bangladesh, particularly through improved rail links, to ease the movement of goods to Dhaka and other key markets.

He also called for the development of international-standard healthcare facilities to help reduce the outflow of foreign currency spent on treatment abroad.

The proposed financing would come from a combination of ADB support, other development partners, private investors and the Bangladesh government, according to finance ministry officials involved with the proceedings.

One of the key objectives would be to attract private investment into economic activities linked to the corridor.

The Economic Relations Division said part of the financing would come directly from ADB, with co-financing arrangements also under consideration.

The plan also seeks to draw foreign investment through projects designed for private sector participation.

ADB has long financed initiatives aimed at boosting trade and economic

cooperation among Bangladesh, India's northeastern states, Bhutan and Nepal.

Within Bangladesh, it has also supported projects focused on domestic economic corridors.

Against this backdrop, officials said ADB is now keen to finance a comprehensive, long-term development plan for Bangladesh.

The proposed corridor initiative is highly ambitious in both scale and scope, though it would be difficult to assess fully without seeing the detailed plan, said Zahid Hussain, former lead economist at the World Bank's Dhaka office.

"A 20-year plan will span multiple electoral cycles. Bangladesh's past experience shows that changes in government often lead to shifts in project priorities. Ensuring continuity of commitment will therefore be a major challenge," he told The Daily Star.

Governance would also be a major factor as such a plan could not be managed by a single ministry.

With components spanning transport, health and industry, it would require a "whole-of-government" approach, he said, adding that it remains unclear which entity would serve as the lead agency, how inter-ministerial coordination would be handled and what the overall management framework would look like.

The success of the plan would depend on a well-defined governance structure, he said. However, the ADB proposed that the Prime Minister's Office or the cabinet division be the coordinating agency.

On financing, Hussain said attracting private investment, including foreign direct investment, would be another big challenge.

'I couldn't bring a single grain home'

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Last evening, the government opened a control room to monitor the situation in the haor regions.

According to data from the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), Boro paddy accounts for nearly 55 percent of Bangladesh's yearly rice production.

Around 20 percent of the country's total rice production comes from the haor region, according to the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute.

For about a decade, excessive rainfall in the pre-monsoon has been recorded in the northeast region of the country and upstream in India.

The rainfall is triggering early flash floods, and the farmers in the haor region are still reeling from the 2017 and 2022 floods that destroyed almost all their Boro harvest.

In Sunamganj, there was a breach yesterday at two farmer-built embankments – the Ikrachhai dyke in Chandalipara village in Madhyanagar upazila and the Gujaoumi embankment at Dekhar Haor in Sadar upazila.

The Water Development Board is on alert to protect all 602 kilometres of newly constructed dykes in the district and has ordered relevant Project Implementation Committees (PIC) to monitor round the clock for any breaches.

"If the dyke construction had been properly completed on time and quality had been ensured, we would be relieved. Now we are in fear and working around the clock to harvest as much paddy as possible," said

Jahid Hasan Arif, a farmer of Korchar Haor in Bishwambarpur upazila in the district.

Jamir Ali, a farmer from Shiyalmara Haor in Sunamganj Sadar upazila, said, "It's raining continuously, and my paddies are almost underwater now. We are struggling to harvest, as labourers don't want to pick paddy from water."

As of yesterday, 65-70 percent of all Boro paddy in the haor districts has been harvested. Now farmers are under pressure to finish before the floods arrive.

Meanwhile, waterlogged fields have rendered combine harvesters useless, and agricultural labourers are nowhere to be found.

"The paddy is ripe, but there are no workers, and machines cannot enter the fields," said Josef Miah, a farmer from Boali village in Khaliajuri Upazila in Netrokona.

He said, "It costs around Tk 2,000 to harvest paddy from one katha. In this situation, harvesting or not harvesting makes no difference – either way, I incur losses."

Even harvested paddy is not safe. Continuous rain has prevented drying, causing grain to sprout in the field or be sold at unfair prices.

Uttam Talukdar, a farmer from Harindhara village in Kolmakanda, said, "I took paddy to the market, but no one is interested in buying wet paddy. I was forced to sell some at Tk 700 per maund just to pay the labourers. After paying them, I was left with nothing."

The situation is intense for the

farmers who cultivated with loans.

Juned Miah, a farmer from Hajipur Union in Kulaura upazila in Moulvibazar, said, "All is lost. I cultivated paddy on loan, spending Tk 27,000 per acre. The paddy was submerged before harvesting."

Farmer Ramzan Ali of Austagram in Kishoreganj said he had borrowed Tk 1.5 lakh to cultivate Boro this season. "As soon as the paddy started ripening, it was submerged in water. Now both debt repayment and livelihood are uncertain," he said.

Kabil Miah, also from Austagram, said, "How can I harvest the paddy that is underwater? The paddy is turning black and brown. The golden paddy is being destroyed in front of my eyes."

Md Jamal Uddin, additional director for monitoring and implementation at the DAE Field Service Wing, said, "All respected departments and officials have been coordinating since April 20 for the prompt harvest of Boro. The chief secretary of the prime minister also ordered the deputy commissioner to take necessary action."

"We have appointed 11 civil service officials in Sunamganj along with another three for Netrokona, Habiganj and Kishoreganj, who will be working to bring in more labourers from different districts and influencing locals to join the harvesting," he said.

[Our correspondent Dwaha Chowdhury, from Sylhet; Mintu Deshwara, from Moulvibazar; Jaydul Islam, from Netrokona; and Tafsilul Aziz, from Kishoreganj, contributed to this report.]

MP Fazlur's remarks

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"No one from a martyr's family or a freedom fighter can join Jamaat. If someone does so, it amounts to a 'double crime'," he said.

At this point, Jamaat MPs began shouting in protest.

The Speaker repeatedly urged the opposition MPs to maintain order, asking Fazlur to continue his speech: "Honourable Members, please preserve discipline in the House."

But Jamaat MPs ignored his call and kept shouting. Amid the uproar, Fazlur said: "Had they found our leader Ziaur Rahman before December 16, they would have killed him."

At one point, the Speaker rose from his seat and urged the opposition members to restore order.

The Speaker reminded the MPs: "This is Bangladesh's national parliament. Every member here is elected and has the right to speak. If you disagree, you may counter with arguments. But disturbing a member while speaking is unacceptable."

He urged the MPs to respect parliamentary procedure, warning: "The way you are behaving, even children would be ashamed. Such venerable individuals, who have become grandfathers, their grandchildren may be sitting in the gallery watching. What will they think about this?"

"When the Speaker rises, it is the duty of all members to sit down. If you do not respect the Chair, people will lose respect for the parliament itself."

He assured the opposition that after Fazlur's speech, they would be given time to respond, even extended time if necessary, and that any unparliamentary remarks would be examined and expunged.

Concluding, the Speaker asked Fazlur to finish within three minutes, after

which the opposition leader would be heard.

Fazlur was then allowed to complete his address, in which he said that December 14, 1971 is observed as Martyred Intellectuals Day.

The hundreds of intellectuals who were killed are said to have been murdered by Al-Badr.

"And you all know whose force Al-Badr was. Unfortunately, on the first day of this parliament, I could not hear much in the parliament [due to sound malfunction]. In this House, a condolence motion was also brought regarding them. Even if I were alone, I would have protested, but since my party did it, I remained silent. The matter is very clear: whether today or tomorrow, or the day after, the main message will go down in history."

Fazlur said he respects the participants of the July uprising. To compare it with the Liberation War and freedom fighters is "wrong".

"But for any reason, August [mass uprising] is not a revolution. August was a mass uprising... Comparing the Liberation War is like comparing the Pacific Ocean with a pond, or the Himalayas with a hillock."

The Liberation War is unparalleled, he said.

"In the jungles of this country, not only cuckoos sing – there are royal places where the Royal Bengal Tiger lives. Against freedom fighters, Razakars will never win in this country," he said.

Both he and the Speaker were freedom fighters, he said.

"After December 16, hundreds of Razakars surrendered to me. I did not kill anyone – I sent them all to jail for trial. My point is: after August 5, 2024, so many police stations were looted, so many policemen were killed. They were not fighting then; they were innocent.

Eskayef begins making

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Simeen said local production of modern insulin cartridges ensures a reliable and uninterrupted supply of lifesaving global insulin for people living with diabetes in the country.

More importantly, it demonstrates Bangladesh's readiness to embrace advanced technology transfer and reinforces the country's position as the critical hub for high value biopharmaceutical manufacturing, she added. "This is a celebration of our capability, a partnership and a future."

Riad Mamun Prodhani, managing director of Novo Nordisk Bangladesh, said the local production is a meaningful step to expand access to modern insulin at a cheaper rate.

National Prof AK Azad Khan,

president of the Diabetic Association of Bangladesh, said Bangladesh has achieved a milestone in the field of biopharmaceutical manufacturing.

"But this should not be the end. Bangladesh needs many more such advancements in this field," he said while presiding over the programme titled "Bravo Bangladesh: Accelerating Access of Modern Insulin."

Maj Gen Shameem Haidar, director general of the Directorate General of Drug Administration, said this collaboration reinforces a fundamental commitment that essential medicines must meet clear requirements for quality, safety, and efficacy, especially for complex biologic products such as insulin.

Christian Brix Møller, the Danish

ambassador to Bangladesh, said

Denmark and Bangladesh share a strong commitment to improving health and building skills and capabilities.

Novo Nordisk's technology transfer and local production partnership with Eskayef is a practical example of how Danish innovation can support access to quality diabetes treatment, while strengthening local biomanufacturing capacity, he said.

Jamal Bhuyan, captain of Bangladesh's national football team; Jay Thyagarajan, senior vice-president, Region Asia Pacific at Novo Nordisk; Thomas Dyg, director, GCM of Novo Nordisk; and Mohammed Ikhtiar Hossain, executive director of Eskayef Pharmaceuticals Ltd, among others, spoke at the programme.

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Later, when Fazlur wanted to speak again, the Speaker did not give him the floor and said: "Now it is not necessary to speak further. We do not want the Parliament to be heated. Please sit down."

If there is any unparliamentary in Fazlur Rahman's speech, it will be expunged, he said.

If there is any unparliamentary in the opposition leader's speech, that too will be expunged."

Top gangster gunned down in New Market

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Rayerbazar and Mohammadpur. Though out on bail, he had been absconding without appearing before court.

Masud Alam, deputy commissioner of DMP's Ramna Division, said police are trying to track down the killers. "Footage from CCTV cameras in surrounding areas is being collected, and eyewitnesses are being interviewed."

Witnesses said two men on a motorcycle carried out the attack.

UK froze £250m linked to Bangladeshis

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further in that area. Of course, we can't talk about specific cases. They all need to follow due legal process and make sure that they are evidence-based. But it is a high priority for us," she said.

Diplomatic Correspondents Association, Bangladesh (DCAB) hosted the event at the Jatiya Press Club.

Cooke said the UK is committed to supporting Bangladesh's efforts to strengthen economic governance

and tackle illicit finance.

The envoy said this is something that they have worked very closely with the government over the last 18 months to two years.

"I think that [steps taken so far] gives you a very strong demonstration of the commitments to working with the government on this area," she said.

The UK will also host the Illicit Finance Summit in London, scheduled for June 23-24, to strengthen international cooperation, share

underworld in the early 1990s, first as a local gang member before expanding his reach. He orchestrated multiple killings and built a powerful arms-trading network. He faced several murder cases, including the high-profile killing of businessman Babar Elahi.

Law enforcers arrested him in the Dhaka cantonment area in 2004. A decade later, he was sentenced to death in the Babar Elahi case. In August 2024, he walked out on bail from Kashimpur High Security Central Jail.

expertise and advance collective action against illicit finance, the high commissioner said.

She said the UK hoped to welcome Bangladesh Finance Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury to London for this gathering.

DCAB President AKM Moinuddin and General Secretary Emrul Kayesh also spoke at the event, where the High Commissioner described the relationship between Bangladesh and the UK as "modern and strategic."