

TCB to start truck sales of essentials today

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The state-run Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) will begin selling three essential commodities to low-income and poor people through mobile trucks today.

Commerce Minister Khandakar Abdul Muktadir is expected to inaugurate the programme, according to a press release from the ministry.

Under the initiative, TCB will sell edible oil, sugar and lentils at subsidised rates through 720 mobile trucks across the country.

Each truck will serve around 400 people daily, and the operation will continue for 10 days.

The ministry said TCB is continuing its regular distribution of edible oil, sugar and lentils at subsidised prices among low-income families holding TCB cards.

In Dhaka, 50 trucks will be deployed, while Chattogram city will have 20 trucks. In the remaining six divisional cities, 15 trucks will operate in each city.

Additionally, 10 trucks will be deployed in each of the 56 district towns.

Under the open market sale (OMS), each buyer will be able to purchase up to two litres of edible oil at Tk 130 per litre, one kilogramme (kg) of sugar at Tk 80, and two kgs of lentils at Tk 70 per kg.

The commerce ministry said around 35,000 tonnes of essential commodities will be distributed among 72 lakh TCB card-holding families ahead of Eid-ul-Azha, one of the largest religious festivals for Muslims.

Sri Lanka to hike power tariff amid energy crisis

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka will increase electricity rates by up to 18 percent from Monday to offset the additional costs of generating power using thermal plants due to the Middle East war, the Public Utilities Commission said.

Consumers using more than 180 units (kilowatt hours) of electricity a month will have to pay an additional 18 percent from Monday, while those using less than that will not see their bills affected.

"The increase will apply to industries, hotels, businesses and government institutions and religious places of worship consuming more than 180 units a month," the commission said in a statement Sunday.

Asean eyes oil reserve, shared grid

AFP, Cebu

Southeast Asian nations hit by soaring fuel and food prices caused by the Middle East war are weighing solutions that include setting up a regional oil reserve, Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos said on Friday.

Leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) called for the opening of the Strait of Hormuz, while also debating a series of ambitious projects aimed at stemming the effects of the next global crisis.

Marcos said all member states agreed on the need to act with speed, speaking to reporters hours after an overnight flare-up in the critical waterway.

"We needed it yesterday, if not sooner," Marcos said of the raft of energy proposals. "That's the way we are approaching the problem."

A closing statement called for the swift ratification of the bloc's Framework Agreement on Petroleum Security, a fuel-sharing scheme aimed at ensuring energy stability.

Members also signed off on a push for an Asean Power Grid, aimed at connecting national electricity networks to enable cross-border power trading.

Marcos said the idea was agreed unanimously, but conceded the devil was in the details.

"Let's talk about the fuel reserve. Is it going to be in one single place? Is it going to be scattered throughout the whole of Asean?" he said.

"Some countries have a surplus of a certain kind of fuel. Other people have a shortage," Marcos said. "We're trying to balance that out."

Singapore Prime Minister Lawrence Wong expressed support during a morning session for both the power grid and the fuel reserve concept, while warning that the effects of the strait's closure would linger long after it was reopened.

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The light engineering sector lacks formal recognition and technical support, entrepreneurs in Pabna say. This photo of workers was taken from a workshop in Pabna's Gachhpara area.

PHOTO: AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU

Small entrepreneurs struggling to go big

Light engineering sector in Pabna grapples with market linkages, Kumarkhali handlooms fight to survive market competition

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, Pabna

Bangladesh's small and medium enterprise (SME) sector accounts for 99 percent of the country's industries, yet many businesses remain trapped by poor market linkages, limited modernisation, and inadequate industrial support.

A recent visit to two major SME clusters – the light engineering hub in Pabna and the handloom cluster in Kumarkhali, Kushtia – found entrepreneurs struggling to expand despite receiving training and loans from the state-run SME Foundation.

LIGHT ENGINEERING STRUGGLING TO SCALE

For many in Pabna, light engineering has long offered a path out of poverty.

Rabiul Islam Farhad, owner of Baba Engineering, spent decades rising from labourer to entrepreneur.

"I bought a machine with my savings ten years ago. Now, I employ ten workers," he said.

Despite producing intricate vehicle parts and industrial components, the sector still lacks formal recognition and technical support.

"With even minimum technical support, our handmade products could be recognised in the national automobile sector," Rabiul added.

Gias Uddin Shiplu, a third-generation entrepreneur at Kafil Uddin Engineering, manages 27 machines but says growth remains constrained by shortages of raw materials, processing facilities, and automated machinery.

"As Pabna is already one of the leading hubs for light engineering in Bangladesh, establishing moulding facilities would help the sector flourish," he suggested.

Shiplu noted that training is less of a concern, as many workers have already received instruction from the SME Foundation, which has also organised workshops to build business networks.

HANDLOOM SECTOR LOSING GROUND

In Kumarkhali's handloom cluster, entrepreneurs say the industry is shrinking rapidly.

Md Abdur Rafiq, owner of Bulbul Textile,

said the number of operational looms has fallen from 5,000 two decades ago to just 1,500 today.

"Our production costs are too high to compete due to the lack of automated machinery," he said.

Md Masud Rana, owner of Rana Textile and a fourth-generation entrepreneur, said Kumarkhali bedsheets received Geographical Indication (GI) recognition but producers still lack export facilities.

"We are dependent on a local market that is too small to support expansion," he said.

Rana suggested supplying thread at mill rates to help improve profit margins and

said most entrepreneurs inherit their trades but lack sufficient technical knowledge and advanced skills.

Since its establishment in 2007, the foundation has surveyed enterprises nationwide and focused on developing entrepreneurial and technical skills, he said.

Farzana Khan, another deputy general manager, said the foundation has disbursed Tk 295 crore in loans through 15 scheduled banks and financial institutions and plans to provide another Tk 440 crore.

Entrepreneurs can access loans ranging from Tk 1 lakh to Tk 25 lakh at single-digit interest rates.



sustain the sector.

SECTOR-WIDE CHALLENGES

According to SME Foundation data, around 70,000 factories operate across 177 SME clusters nationwide, generating an annual turnover of Tk 30,000 crore.

A 2024 report by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics said there are 1.18 crore industries in the country, 99 percent of which are SMEs. The sector contributes 30 percent to the economy and provides 85 percent of industrial employment, involving more than 3 crore people.

Mohammed Morshed Alam, deputy general manager of the SME Foundation,

Beyond financing, the foundation regularly organises training programmes in Dhaka and across industrial clusters with support from the Bangladesh Industrial Technical Assistance Center (BITAC), chambers of commerce, and district administrations.

Around 20 lakh people have received training over the past two decades. The foundation also organises fairs in Dhaka and other major cities to improve market linkages for SMEs.

According to foundation data, both loans and training support have been extended to the Pabna Light Engineering Cluster and Kumarkhali Textile Cluster.

Effective governance needs honest dissent

MD TOUHIDUL ALAM KHAN

Good governance is not about ticking boxes or following a prescribed set of rules. It is reflected in the decisions made every day; decisions that require clarity, integrity and the courage to confront reality. It means choosing what protects the long-term wellbeing of an institution, even in difficult moments. At its core, governance depends on a culture that values honesty over blind agreement, structured thinking over individual dominance and independent judgement over passive compliance. A "yes-sir" culture strips an organisation of a vital defence: the ability to identify and address problems before they spiral.

An effective system begins with clearly defined roles and robust processes. Boards must have both the authority and the capacity to ask difficult questions, seek timely and relevant information, and meet when risks emerge. Management, in turn, must provide information that is accurate, complete and prompt. Excessive optimism, weak controls or the withholding of information can disrupt this flow and heighten risk. Clarifying responsibilities, formalising decision-making authority and ensuring reliable reporting mechanisms are essential to reducing uncertainty and strengthening oversight.

Equally important is an environment where dissent can be expressed safely. Constructive disagreement is not obstruction; it is a form of internal quality control. It tests assumptions, challenges strategy and ultimately strengthens decisions. Independent committees, external reviews, whistleblower protections and structured dialogue all help legitimise differing views and ensure concerns are heard. Leaders must treat challenge not as a threat but as a responsibility.

Internal transparency matters as much as external reporting. Addressing issues early, conducting thorough reviews and taking corrective action signal institutional maturity and limit harm. Concealing failure may offer short-term comfort, but it usually magnifies damage over time. Openly acknowledging setbacks protects credibility and allows organisations to improve. Incentives play a part. When integrity and problem-solving are recognised as core values, people are more likely to raise concerns rather than suppress them.

Governance also requires renewal. Over time, boards and executive teams can fall into familiar patterns of thinking, increasing the risk of blind spots. Regular assessments of board composition, skills and performance help keep governance relevant. Genuine diversity of background and experience is not a box-ticking exercise; it strengthens judgement. Board rotation, succession planning and independent evaluations introduce fresh perspectives and challenge embedded assumptions. Such measures ensure oversight remains responsive to evolving risks.

Rigorous governance can be demanding. Discussions may be slower and more probing. But these are investments in resilience. The costs of failure, such as financial loss, regulatory penalties and reputational damage, almost always exceed the effort required to prevent them. Investors, regulators and stakeholders increasingly reward well-governed institutions, recognising that they carry lower risk and deliver steadier performance over time.

Ultimately, governance goes beyond compliance. It creates an ethical framework that guides decisions, supports informed risk-taking and keeps risk visible and managed. It requires humility from executives and courage from boards. Leaders must accept scrutiny, admit mistakes and apply rules consistently, while boards must challenge assumptions and act decisively. Governance must also be embedded in daily practice, reinforced through incentives, training and clear communication.

Good governance is both discipline and mindset. It is sustained not by rules alone, but by consistent practice, ethical leadership and transparent communication that align daily actions with long-term goals. Institutions that embrace these principles are better placed to navigate uncertainty, adapt to change and retain the trust of stakeholders. By embedding accountability and courage at every level of decision-making, they turn governance from a formal obligation into a durable source of strength and credibility.

The writer is managing director and chief executive officer of NRBC Bank and a qualified cost and management accountant



EU opens door to using US jet fuel as shortages loom

AFP, Brussels

How big is the jet fuel threat to Europe's summer holidays? The EU says it is not facing shortages yet, but it is readying for the worst – and weighing options including using US kerosene as a back-up.

The US-Israeli war with Iran and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz have sent aviation fuel prices soaring and raised the spectre of shortages during Europe's peak travel season.

On Friday, the EU Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) cleared the way for the use of Jet A, a US-produced aviation fuel that is not currently used in Europe except on return flights from the United States for technical reasons.

In new recommendations, EASA said: "A potential introduction of Jet A in Europe or in other parts of the world would not generate safety concerns provided that its introduction is properly managed."

US-produced Jet A has a higher freezing point than the Jet A-1 fuel used elsewhere in the world – making it less resistant to very low temperatures during long-haul flights.

The EASA conditioned its use, warning that its introduction into a system

historically running on Jet A-1 could see "operational" risks when both fuels are used.

At the same time, the European Commission outlined measures available to member states to optimise jet fuel use, including aircraft loading and the allocation of airport slots.

WHAT ABOUT EUROPE'S JET FUEL

STOCKS?

Brussels has repeatedly insisted the 27-nation EU is not yet facing jet fuel shortages.

"At this stage, this is more a problem of economics and fuel costs than availability," Matteo Mirolo, an aviation transport specialist, told AFP.

But "we do have to think about supply,



Passengers wait to board an aircraft of low cost Irish airline Ryanair at Antonio Canova airport, Italy. The US-Israeli war with Iran have sent aviation fuel prices soaring, raising the spectre of shortages during Europe's peak travel season.

PHOTO: AFP/FILE

especially as this will not be the last crisis we face."

Before the Middle East war, around 20 percent of the kerosene consumed in Europe transited through the Strait of Hormuz that has been effectively closed by the conflict.

As prices have surged, several airlines, particularly low-cost carriers, have announced flight cancellations.

If the crisis drags on, Brussels is preparing for possible "security of supply issues," EU energy commissioner Dan Jorgensen said Tuesday.

"We are not there yet, but it can happen," Jorgensen said.

The commission said last week it would establish a "fuel observatory" to track EU production, imports, exports and stock levels of transport fuels. It is expected to be up and running in coming days.

Until now, the EU has lacked a detailed overview of strategic fuel stocks across member states.

European legislation requires countries to hold oil stocks equivalent to 90 days of net imports and 61 days of domestic consumption, but does not distinguish between different products such as petrol, diesel or jet fuel.

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