Govt plans inclusive, secure AI-powered public services

Says PM's Adviser Rehan Asad

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The government wants to use artificial intelligence to make public services smarter without compromising privacy, security or the inclusion of citizens who cannot keep pace with digitalisation, said Rehan Asad, adviser to the prime minister on ICT and telecommunications, yesterday.

"We want to make sure we leave no one behind," he said at an event at Pan Pacific Sonargaon Dhaka.

Rehan was speaking at a session titled "Who Decides When the Model Decides? AI in the Machinery of the State", organised by the Centre for Governance Studies as part of the Bay of Bengal Conversation.

He said the government was designing its planned "One Citizen One ID" system around five principles: simplicity, privacy, security, inclusivity and interoperability.

"These would guide it from the architecture, the planning, to the implementation," he said.

The system will use the latest technologies, including AI, but technology will not determine how it is designed, Rehan said.

"We want to build a system that makes people's lives easier, more accessible, and more secure," he said.

The planned digital infrastructure will connect services that are now scattered across different government agencies through a single citizen portal, he said.

"Whether you, as a citizen, want to have your education certificate -- that should be built into your citizen portal," he said.

Citizens should also be able to access their medical records, important documents and utility-related services through the platform, he added.

Susan Vize, head of office and representative of UNESCO in Bangladesh, said AI policies would need to evolve continuously, while AI literacy would require people to develop a range of skills.

"Policies in response to AI have to keep evolving," she said.

Waruna Sri Dhanapala, secretary of Sri Lanka's Ministry of Digital Economy, stressed the need to build a sustainable ecosystem for data protection and privacy.

Nicola Nixon, executive director of InsightWorks at The Asia Foundation, said digital platforms had both benefits and drawbacks, while automation could increase pressure for greater accountability.

"Digital platforms can also build the capacity for respect, as they have both upsides and downsides," she said.

SM Ziauddin Hyder, special assistant to the prime minister on health affairs, said the government was working to establish a standard healthcare system in every union.

"We are in the process of building a standard healthcare system in each and every Union," he said.

Kazi Faisal Bin Seraj, country representative for Bangladesh at The Asia Foundation, moderated the event.



Md Ahteshamul Haque Khan, managing director and CEO of Dutch-Bangla Bank PLC, poses for a photograph with participants of the bank's "Strategic Conclave 2026" for the Barishal region at a local hotel in Barishal on Friday. PHOTO: DUTCH-BANGLA BANK

Dutch-Bangla Bank holds strategic conclave for Barishal region

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Dutch-Bangla Bank PLC (DBBL) on Friday held its "Strategic Conclave 2026" for the Barishal region at a local hotel in Barishal to formulate business strategies for its branches and strengthen customer service.

Md Ahteshamul Haque Khan, managing director and CEO of the bank, inaugurated the programme as the chief guest, according to a press release.

In his speech, Ahteshamul said DBBL had undertaken various strategies to become the "Best Financial Solution Partner" and "Trusted Partner" for its customers.

He highlighted several strategic priorities, including fostering a client-centric mentality to ensure service excellence.

He urged all participants to contribute more effectively towards achieving the bank's strategic objectives and strengthening its position in the industry.

The branch managers of the Barishal region presented their respective strategies at the conclave and assured the management that they would achieve their business targets through excellent customer service.

The senior management team also shared their observations and provided guidance on improving customer service and achieving business targets.

Officials from the region's branches and sub-branches, regional heads of Rocket and agent banking, and alternative delivery channel (ADC) supervisors joined the conclave virtually.

Govt aims to pull capital market out of crisis: Khosru

FROM PAGE B1

of assistance, with many initiatives taken on a piecemeal basis, he said.

As a result, the capital market failed to develop as it should have. Instead, both the government and the private sector became overly dependent on banks, often borrowing at high interest rates, the minister said.

"Every regulatory body operated like an island, working independently without coordinating with others. That was another weakness of our capital market. Now, all regulators meet every month," he said.

"Our market is shallow and lacks depth. We need to build that depth by creating the right environment. No good company will list in a 'casino'."

The days of running the country on funds from the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Asian Development Bank are over, he said.

"We are going to the market to raise money. We are going to float dollar bonds in New York, and we will go for Panda bonds, Samurai bonds and local currency bonds. Bangladesh's financial architecture is changing."

Insurance Development and Regulatory Authority (IDRA) Chairman Mir Nadia Nivin said increasing life insurance penetration would benefit the capital market. "The insurers can provide long-term institutional capital to the bond market, equity market and infrastructure financing. And that is the scale of what is missing," she said.

BSEC Chairman Masud Khan outlined the commission's recent activities to restore investor confidence.

Tanvir Shahriar Ghani, special assistant to the prime minister on investment and capital market affairs, attended the event as the guest of honour.

Nazma Mobarek, secretary of the Financial Institutions Division of the Ministry of Finance, and Tanwir Habib Rahman and Hossain Sadat, BSEC commissioners, also spoke.

Non-banks losing out to unfair rules

FROM PAGE B1

Rizwan Dawood Shams, managing director of IPDC Finance, said NBFIs have been left with only part of the services that banks can offer.

Describing deposits as the raw material for business, Rizwan said finance companies cannot operate current and savings accounts (CASA), while banks can mobilise cheaper CASA deposits. NBFIs also cannot take certain government and mutual-fund deposits and have to rely heavily on relatively expensive term deposits.

policies with banks where we operate at a similar level," he said.

Asif Saad Bin Shams, additional managing director and chief risk officer of IDLC Finance, said non-performing loans at non-banks have risen to around 37 percent, with the deterioration reflecting both economic weakness and decisions taken by the authorities to tackle pandemic fallout.

Relaxations that allowed borrowers to remain labelled as regular despite missed instalments delayed recognition of bad loans, he said. When those relaxations were withdrawn, many accounts became classified as non-performing from 2023 onwards.

"The regulatory relaxation eventually came back as a boomerang," said Asif.

He said weak economic activity has since compounded the problem, affecting corporate, SME and retail borrowers.

whereas finance companies remain subject to an eight-year maximum.

He said finance companies were originally established to provide long-term financing because banks themselves faced maturity mismatches in funding such loans. Over time, however, banks moved into many of the same businesses, helped by their access to low-cost deposits.

Finance companies now face a different funding structure while competing for many of the same customers, Kanti said.

The sector's liquidity difficulties have also been aggravated by the underdeveloped bond market and banks' reluctance to provide long-term funding to finance companies, he added.

The discussants said depositors continue to perceive bank deposits as safer because of the support extended to troubled banks, while depositors of failed finance companies have not received comparable protection

He said depositors placing funds with an NBFI also generally cannot withdraw them before three months without prior approval from the Bangladesh Bank.

"That naturally makes our cost of funds higher," Rizwan said. "Our cost of funds will decline if we are given the opportunity to collect deposits of government agencies and mutual funds."

The funding disadvantage also makes it difficult for NBFIs to compete with banks in products such as home and auto loans. Banks now also offer home loans for longer terms, further limiting the scope for finance companies.

Rizwan said the issue is not about giving NBFIs preferential treatment.

"We are not asking for anything extra. We are urging for alignment of

The discussants said depositors, at the same time, continue to perceive bank deposits as safer because of the support extended to troubled banks, while depositors of failed finance companies have not received comparable protection.

They said the issue is therefore not only about regulation but also about how the market perceives the two types of institutions. The difference is also evident when troubled borrowers seek to restructure their loans.

Kanti said that under a recent special guideline, banks can reschedule or restructure loans for up to 15 years,

Govt to launch employment exchange centre in Dec

FROM PAGE B1

Plans are also underway to develop young people's skills through partnerships with skill-development institutions under various ministries, he added.

In the proposed budget for fiscal year 2026-27, Finance Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury said, "To establish a fair and merit-based employment system, the government has undertaken an initiative to establish an 'Employment Exchange' programme at the district and upazila levels across the country.

"Registered candidates here will be provided with the necessary support for appointment to vacant positions in various organisations, based on their merit and skills."

Why fewer than 1% people in Bangladesh invest in stocks

FROM PAGE B1

participating in securities markets is much higher. Why, then, is appetite for the stock market so low in Bangladesh?

It would be inaccurate to suggest that people are inherently reluctant to invest in stocks. In 2010, people rushed to the stock market, pushing the number of BO accounts above 33 lakh. However, the figure began to decline following the infamous market crash that year.

Profitability has always been a key driver of stock market participation. However, Bangladesh's market lacks reliable investment opportunities, with investors losing their hard-earned money to fraudulent brokerage firms, fund managers and companies whose financial statements are riddled with irregularities.

Even financially strong firms remain conservative in paying cash dividends despite holding hundreds of crores of taka in bank deposits.

Consequently, investors have struggled to improve their financial positions, even by investing in fundamentally sound stocks.

With only 10 to 15 entities generating good returns, prices rose mainly for low-paid-up-capital companies, attracting investors to junk stocks and providing market manipulators with opportunities to profit.

Market manipulators received paltry punishments despite the severity of their wrongdoing. More concerningly, investors often found little protection from the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC).

The regulator extended the tenure of closed-end mutual funds by 10 years, delaying investors' access to their money. It also allowed listed mutual funds to issue bonus shares and approved several companies' fundraising plans, adding to market liabilities.

Sikder Insurance, for instance, invested around 72 percent of its life fund in junk stocks before launching its IPO (initial public offering). Such regulatory decisions further eroded investor confidence, leaving little incentive to participate in the stock market.

The Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) has recently started returning funds embezzled by a couple of brokerage firms to investors. While this is praiseworthy, it remains a modest remedy for years of mistreatment.

Following the fall of the Awami League government in 2024, the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC) was reconstituted and began pursuing reforms across various areas. This is encouraging.

BSEC Chairman Masud Khan has outlined his vision for the market and made several commitments. Delivering on them by simplifying the listing process, digitising procedures and protecting investors' interests could encourage more people to invest.

The market needs a sound equity market alongside a vibrant bond market, with other products introduced gradually. The regulator must also prevent defaults by bond issuers from undermining the bond market.

Attracting well-performing companies, curbing secondary-market manipulation and preventing intermediaries from embezzling investors' funds should be key priorities. Above all, the regulator must consistently protect investors.

Dictating index movements or turnover is not the regulator's role. Instead, it should focus on sound policymaking, good governance and accountability.

Delivering on these commitments would be the best gift for investors as Bangladesh prepares to celebrate World Investor Week.

Request for Expressions of Interest (REOI)
(Consulting Services – Selection of Firms)

Country: Bangladesh
Project: Construction of New Dual Gauge Railway Line from Bogura to Sirajganj
Project No.: P001105
Contract/Assignment Title: Construction Supervision Services for "Construction of New Dual-Gauge Railway Line from Bogura to Sirajganj" Project
REOI Reference No: BSRLP/CSC/SD2/54.01.0000.710.34.0041.26-1487; Date-01/10/2026
Client: Bangladesh Railway

1. The Government of Bangladesh has applied for financing from the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) toward the cost of the Construction of New Dual-Gauge Railway Line from Bogura to Sirajganj Project. The project intends to develop approximately 85.67 km of main line and 33.25 km of new dual-gauge railway line from Bogura to Sirajganj, together with 11 stations, associated structures, bridges/ culverts, and modern signaling and telecommunications systems. The portion of the proceeds of the financing is intended to be used as payments under the contract for the Consultancy Service for construction supervision for the project for which the EOI is issued.
2. The consulting services ("the services") include assistance to the PIU in overall contract management, administration, and planning, as well as technical support, construction supervision, testing and inspection, monitoring of environmental, gender, social and resettlement aspects, oversight during the defect notification period, capacity building and overall project management support throughout the project.
3. It is expected that the Consultancy Assignment will be for a period of Forty-Eight (48) months, including Twelve (12) months of Defect Liability Period (DLP). The consultancy service is scheduled to start in Q2 2027, and it will be time-based.
4. The detailed Terms of Reference (TOR) for the assignment can be downloaded from the Bangladesh Railway official site link (https://railway.gov.bd/pages/tenders/office-of-the-project-director-construction-of-new-dual-gauge-railway-line-from-bogura-to-sirajganj-tor-of-cscbsrlp-x0j6g5-6abdf15747d06821a1096a45) and evaluation criteria is also can be downloaded from Bangladesh Railway website link (https://railway.gov.bd/pages/tenders/office-of-the-project-director-construction-of-new-dual-gauge-railway-line-from-bogura-to-sirajganj-tor-of-cscbsrlp-x0j6g5-6abdf15747d06821a1096a45) or both ToR and Evaluation Criteria can be obtained from the address below.
   Address: Room No-508, Rail Bhaban, 4/3 Abdul Gani Road, Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh
5. The Project Implementation Unit (PIU) of Bangladesh Railway now invites eligible consulting firms ("Consultants") to indicate their interest in providing the Services. Interested Consultants should provide information demonstrating that they have the required qualifications and relevant experience to perform the Services.
6. Key Experts will not be evaluated at the shortlisting stage.
7. The selection is conducted in accordance with AIIB's Directive on Procurement Instructions for Recipients (July 26, 2024) ("PIR", which can be accessed at https://www.aiib.org/en/policies-strategies/_download/operational-directive/AIIB-Directive-on-Procurement-Instructions-for-Recipients-July-26-2024.pdf")
8. Consultants may associate with other firms to enhance their qualifications but should indicate clearly whether the association is in the form of a joint venture and/or a sub-consultancy. In the case of a joint venture, all the partners in the joint venture shall be jointly and severally liable for the entire contract, if selected.
9. The attention of interested Consultants is drawn to Section 2.3.5 and 2.4 of the PIR, setting forth the AIIB's policy on conflict of interest and eligibility. The consultant will be selected in accordance with the AIIB Procurement Policy and its associated PIR.
10. A Consultant will be selected in accordance with the Quality and Cost-Based Selection (QCBS) method set out in the PIR.
11. Further information can be obtained at the address below during office hours.
12. With all supporting documents, the hard copy EOI must be submitted to the following address on 28 October, 2026 at on or before 12.30 PM (Bangladesh Standard Time) on in sealed envelopes marked with "Consultancy Services for Construction Supervision of Construction of New Dual-Gauge Railway Line from Bogura to Sirajganj Project", and also the scanned copy of all documents (PDF format) to be sent as an attachment in a pen drive with sealed envelope to the following address.

Address: Office of the Project Director, Construction of New Dual Gauge Railway Line from Bogura to Sirajganj Project, Room No. 508, Rail Bhaban, 4/3, Abdul Gani Road, Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh.

01·10·26
Md. Abu Zafor Miah
Project Director
E-mail: pdbsrlp@gmail.com
Phone: +8801711622942

GD-2404