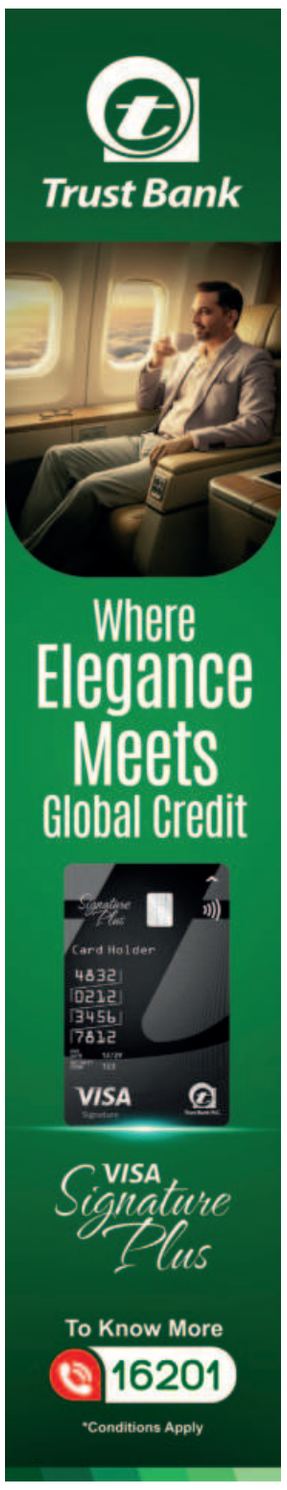
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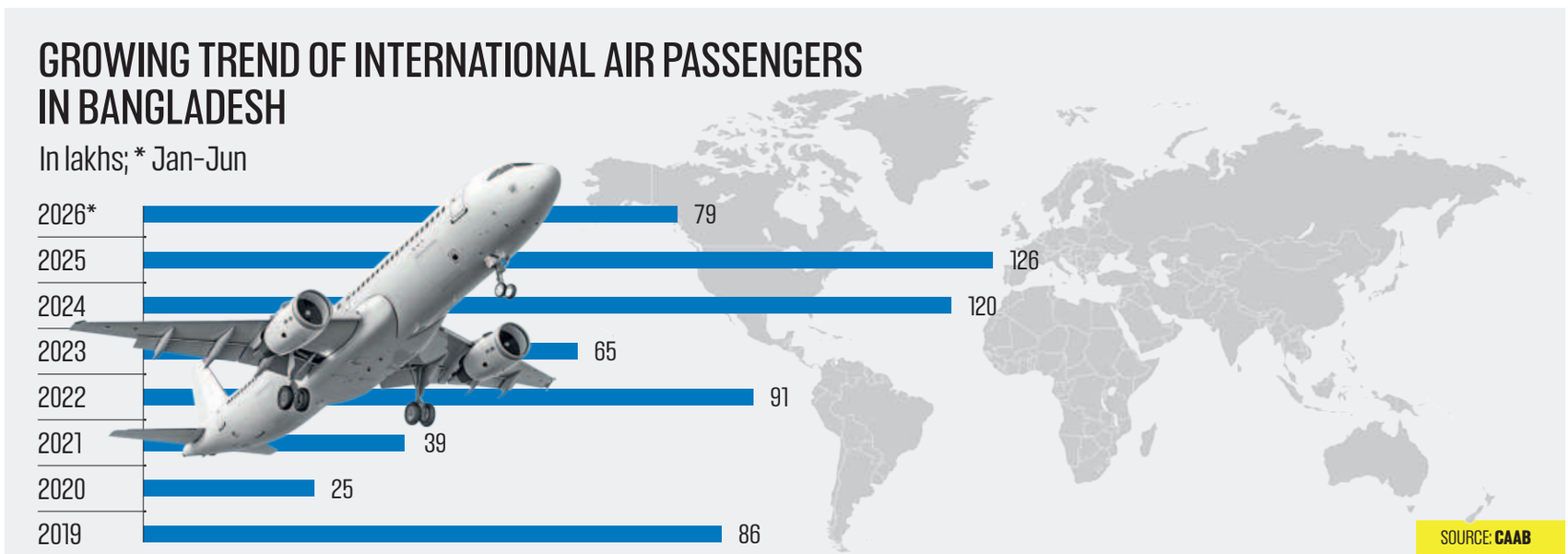
Business



CARD ISSUANCE NEARLY DOUBLES IN 5 YEARS: BB REPORT



International air traffic nearly doubles, but airports can't keep up



MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN *and* **SOHEL PARVEZ**

International air passenger traffic in Bangladesh nearly doubled in two years, reaching 1.26 crore in 2025 from 64.5 lakh in 2023. The trend is likely to continue this year as domestic and foreign carriers increase flights and add new routes.

The rise in international passenger numbers is attributed to more Bangladeshis travelling abroad for work, higher disposable incomes and growing demand for religious pilgrimages, overseas medical treatment, tourism and other purposes.

Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (HSIA) in Dhaka has handled the lion's share of these travellers.

Yet airport infrastructure, particularly at HSIA or Dhaka airport, the country's main international gateway, has failed to keep pace with rising demand.

Besides, national flag carrier Biman Bangladesh Airlines has also been slow to expand its fleet, leaving foreign airlines well placed to capture a larger share of the growing market.

The mismatch between demand and capacity is creating two problems -- congestion and poor services for passengers at airports, and lost opportunities for domestic airlines.

In the January-June period of this year, airlines carried 79 lakh international passengers to and from Bangladesh, according to the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB).

"We have seen good movement of travellers so far this year," said Kamrul Islam, general manager of public relations at US-Bangla Airlines Ltd, the country's largest private carrier.

Bangladesh's airports, particularly Dhaka airport, handled around 85.95 lakh passengers in 2019. The number fell to 25.40 lakh in 2020 as countries imposed travel restrictions to contain the spread of Covid-19.

Passenger traffic recovered as restrictions eased and airlines restored services in subsequent years.

"Removal of Covid restrictions fuelled passenger flow while airlines opened new routes and increased flight frequencies," said Kamrul.

Besides four domestic airlines, 34 foreign carriers operate passenger flights from Bangladesh to 25 destinations in 17 countries, according to CAAB.

The Middle East, which employs around three-fourths of Bangladeshi migrant workers, is the largest international market, followed by Asia-Pacific and Europe, according to a report published by the International Air Transport Association (IATA) in February 2025.

Based on 2023 data, the IATA identified Jeddah, Kuala Lumpur and Riyadh as the busiest international routes from Bangladesh, followed by Dubai, Muscat, Doha, Dammam, Kolkata, Sharjah and London.

Bangladesh's aviation sector directly employed nearly 30,000 people and generated $2.4 billion in economic output, equivalent to 0.6 percent of GDP, based on 2023 data.

Aviation and aviation-supported tourism contributed another measure of economic activity, generating $5.3 billion, or 1.2 percent of GDP.

Captain AKM Aminul Islam, director of flight operations at Biman Bangladesh Airlines, attributed the increase in international passenger traffic to overseas employment, higher incomes, more affordable air travel and rising demand for Umrah.

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Clothing brands report better sales this Puja

SUKANTA HALDER

Branded fashion retailers across Bangladesh reported sales growth of 5 to 10 percent during this year's Durga Puja compared with last year, driven by strong festive demand, particularly for women's wear.

Despite the growth, sales fell short of expectations at one retailer as consumers facing tighter budgets bought fewer items than they might have otherwise.

Shaheen Ahmed, owner of fashion brand Anjan's, said sales had increased by around 10 percent year-on-year. "Given the current economic and political situation, we are satisfied with the sales," he said.

Soumik Das, chief executive of Rang Bangladesh, reported sales growth of around 5 percent, half the 10 percent increase the company had expected.

Shopping typically begins about two weeks before Durga Puja. Sarees and salwar-kameez sets are among the biggest draws, traders said

He attributed the shortfall partly to declining purchasing power, saying customers who might previously have bought two outfits were now purchasing only one.

Kazi Maktum Shovon, head of sales and marketing at Mbrella, also reported sales growth of around 5 percent. Demand for women's three-piece outfits, comprising matching salwar-kameez sets, was particularly strong at the brand's outlets during the festive season, he told The Daily Star.

Asad Kabir, a senior executive for marketing at Yellow, said sales during this year's Durga Puja had been moderate so far, partly due to reduced business operating hours. However, he remained optimistic about a stronger finish, with several days of festive shopping still ahead.

Although there are no official figures, industry insiders estimate that the two Eid festivals account for around 70 percent of annual festival-related retail sales, while Durga Puja contributes about 10 percent. Pahela Baishakh and other occasions account for much of the remainder.

Shopping typically begins about two weeks before Durga Puja and continues for several days after the festivities begin.

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Garment workers block a road in Uttara's Azampur area on October 15, protesting over wages as rising living costs erode their earnings, and debate continues over higher wages and the role of international buyers. PHOTO: **MEHEDI HASAN**

Why garment wage unrest keeps returning

TASNEEM TAYEB

For some garment workers, earning Tk 19,000 to Tk 20,000 a month means working 15 to 16 hours a day, including overtime, labour representatives told The Daily Star.

Even then, their earnings barely cover rent, food, children's education and medicine. One representative said monthly rent for accommodation that cost Tk 2,500 a few years ago has risen to around Tk 7,500.

Workers in Uttara took to the streets this month, demanding Tk 30,000 in wages and payment of arrears. The protests led to clashes with police on October 17, leaving at least 50 people, including 18 police personnel, injured.

"Our only demand is either to lower the prices of essential commodities or raise our wages so that we can afford to make ends meet," protester Sharifa Begum told The Daily Star during an earlier blockade.

The protests come nearly three years after the last minimum-wage revision, followed by a separate agreement with workers and an increase in annual increments.

Interviews with labour representatives and manufacturers reveal broad agreement that international buyers should do more to fund higher wages. But they disagree on why Bangladesh has so little bargaining power.

NEWS ANALYSIS

WHAT WAGES CAN BUY

The minimum monthly wage for garment workers was set at Tk 12,500 in November 2023. This is the gross minimum wage, while some protesters in Uttara are demanding Tk 30,000 in basic pay, so the two figures are not directly comparable.

Prices have continued to rise. Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics data show inflation at 8.34 percent in September 2026, with food inflation at 7.22 percent and non-food inflation at 9.30 percent. The World Bank's October Bangladesh Development Update also said persistent inflation was reducing household purchasing power and raising business costs.

Labour representatives say many workers depend heavily on overtime to meet household expenses, raising concerns about excessive working hours and compliance with labour laws.

Labour rights advocate Kalpona Akter said wage demands must be assessed against rising costs of essentials and healthcare. She questioned the government's response to inflation, saying workers had heard assurances about forming a wage board but received little clarity on possible relief or when a decision might come.

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SPOTLIGHT

BFIU issues anti-money laundering rules for insurers

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU) issued a set of guidelines for insurance companies operating in Bangladesh to prevent money laundering and the financing of terrorism.

The guidelines require stringent compliance frameworks, mandatory customer due diligence and rigorous transaction monitoring across all life and non-life insurance operations.

In a circular issued on Monday, the financial intelligence agency outlined the measures insurers must follow to comply with the Money Laundering Prevention Act 2012, the Anti-Terrorism Act 2009 and the rules issued under the two laws.

The guidelines require each insurance company to formulate its own policies to prevent money laundering and terrorist financing, taking into account international standards, existing laws and regulations, and instructions issued by the BFIU.

The policies must be approved by the company's board of directors or, where applicable, its highest policy-making or management committee. Insurers must communicate the policies to relevant

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Islamic banks' workforce shrinks 6% in a year: BB

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Islamic banks in Bangladesh saw their workforce shrink by 6 percent year-on-year in August 2026 amid growing digitalisation and automation of financial services and management problems at some banks, according to a Bangladesh Bank report.

Total manpower at Islamic banks stood at 44,782 in August 2026, down from 47,641 a year earlier, according to the central bank's recently published Monthly Islamic Banking and Finance Statistics report.

The report cited digitalisation and automation as factors reducing the need for manual administrative and operational staff at financial institutions.

"After the July 2024 uprising, an unstable situation has arisen due to improper management of Islamic banks, especially in full-fledged shariah-based banks; manpower shows a declining trend," the report said.

"On the contrary, conventional banks having shariah-based banking operations are gradually expanding their Islamic banking activities, with an increase in manpower."

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