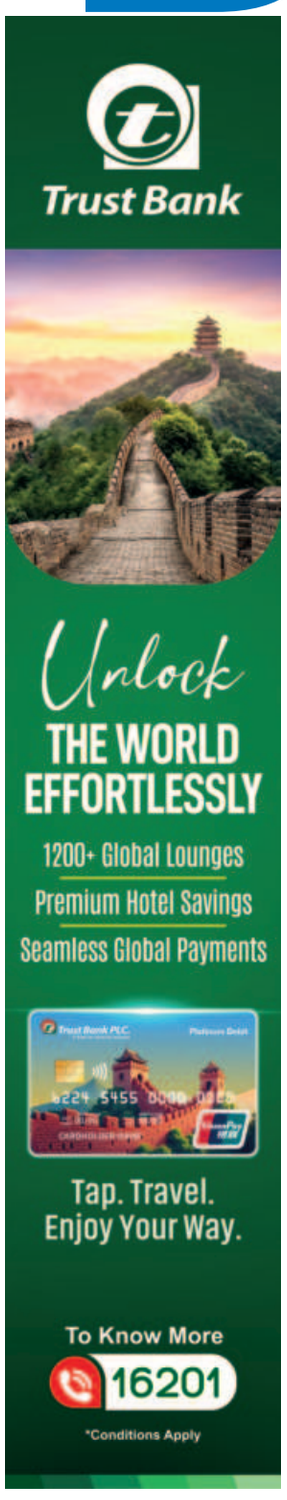
DHAKA MONDAY OCTOBER 26, 2026, KARTIK 10, 1433 BS
starbusiness@thedailystar.net

Business

B4 WHAT HAPPENS AFTER LDC GRADUATION?



BB to relax lending rules for Tk 1,700cr City Group bailout

Eight banks to extend fresh loans to the debt-laden conglomerate

MD MEHEDI HASAN

Eight private commercial banks are set to receive regulatory relief to extend Tk 1,700 crore in fresh loans to debt-laden City Group, in a move aimed at keeping its operations running and ensuring supplies of essential commodities ahead of Ramadan.

The banks are City Bank, Mutual Trust Bank, Prime Bank, Dutch-Bangla Bank, Southeast Bank, Trust Bank, NCC Bank and Pubali Bank.

In consultation with the government, the decision in principle was taken at a meeting between the eight banks and Bangladesh Bank Governor Mostaqur Rahman at the central bank's headquarters yesterday, according to meeting sources.

Bangladesh Bank plans to exempt them from Section 27(Ka Ka) of the Bank Company Act, 1991, which restricts lending to loan defaulters

At the lenders' request, Bangladesh Bank plans to exempt them from Section 27(Ka Ka) of the Bank Company Act, 1991, which restricts lending to loan defaulters. The central bank intends to use its authority under Section 121 to grant the exemption.

The conglomerate owes around Tk 26,000 crore to 48 domestic and foreign banks and financial institutions, some of which have already classified its loans as defaulted. The exemption would allow the banks to extend fresh loans and open letters of credit (LCs) for City Group despite its default status.

A source present at the meeting said a syndication agreement between the eight banks and the group is nearing completion.

Under the proposed syndication, City Bank would provide Tk 300 crore, while each of the other seven banks would contribute Tk 200 crore, the READ MORE ON B2

Japanese firms warming up to Bangladesh



REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Japanese companies are increasingly looking to Bangladesh, attracted by its large consumer base, growing middle class and potential for investment.

Surveys by the Japan External Trade Organisation (JETRO) show that consumer goods are among the main areas of interest of the firms.

Over the years, the organisation has also identified Bangladesh as one of South Asia's most promising destinations for business, citing its large population and rising purchasing power.

Japan has spent years planning to expand investment and relocate more industries to Bangladesh, particularly in garments and textiles, under its Big B plan, or Bay of Bengal Industrial Growth Belt.

The plan envisages an industrial corridor linking Dhaka, Chattogram and Cox's Bazar, modelled on the industrial hubs of Tokyo and Osaka that developed between the 1960s and 1980s and helped drive industrial growth of the island nation.

A few years ago, more than 85 percent of the nearly 338 Japanese companies running businesses in Bangladesh told JETRO they wanted a free trade agreement between the two countries to boost bilateral trade and investment.

More recently, nearly 72 percent said they planned to expand in Bangladesh within a year or two, viewing the country as a promising market.

In February this year, Bangladesh and Japan signed an Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) to strengthen trade and investment ties.

Kazuiki Kataoka, country representative of JETRO Bangladesh and the current president of the Japan-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry (JBCCI), said many Japanese companies are relocating from China to Bangladesh, drawn mainly by lower labour costs and the size of the domestic market.

READ MORE ON B2



Websites still vulnerable despite cyber warnings

MAHMUDUL HASAN

Several government and private organisations in Bangladesh are using outdated or unsupported versions of PHP, a programming language widely used to build websites, potentially leaving their public-facing online services vulnerable to cyberattacks, the government's cyber security agency has warned.

The Cyber Threat Intelligence (CTI) Unit of Bangladesh e-Government Computer Incident Response Team (BGD e-GOV CIRT) identified the weaknesses through routine monitoring, according to a high-severity alert issued yesterday.

Despite earlier warnings and advisories, several organisations have yet to respond or confirm that they have taken the necessary security measures, the alert said.

Govt, private organisations yet to confirm security fixes as PHP flaw disrupts online services

"Continued exposure of these services without verified security updates may increase the risk of exploitation and compromise," it added.

The agency did not name the organisations or disclose how many websites remain vulnerable.

The warning came three days after CIRT issued an advisory on October 22 about "PHP2Shell", a set of vulnerabilities that could allow attackers to run malicious code on servers remotely without logging in. Such attacks could expose sensitive information, compromise servers and disrupt online services.

CIRT identified five potential risks: attackers running malicious code remotely, gaining unauthorised access to web applications and underlying systems, stealing data, disrupting services and using compromised systems to launch further attacks.

However, the agency cautioned that running an outdated version of PHP does not necessarily mean a system has been attacked. The actual risk depends on the version in use, whether security patches have been applied, how the system is configured and how exposed it is to the internet.

IMMEDIATE ACTION URGED

CIRT urged organisations to take immediate steps to secure their internet-facing systems.

READ MORE ON B2

SPOTLIGHT

ADP spending hits 17-year low in Q1

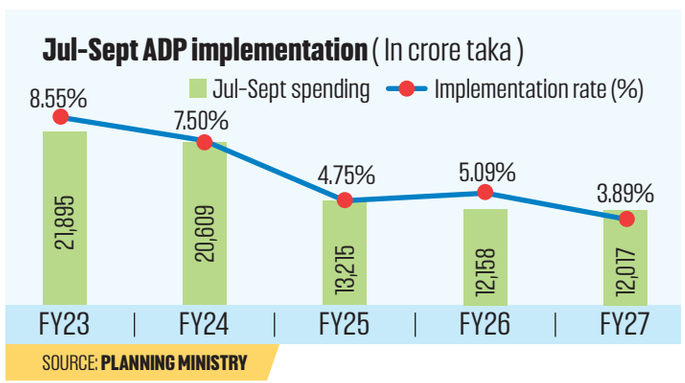
MD ASADUZ ZAMAN

The government's development spending in the first quarter of fiscal year 2026-27 (FY27) fell to its lowest level in at least 17 years, raising concerns about its ability to implement budget plans and support economic growth.

Ministries and divisions spent Tk 12,017 crore, or just 3.89 percent of the Annual Development Programme (ADP) allocation, between July and September, according to data from the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED) released yesterday.

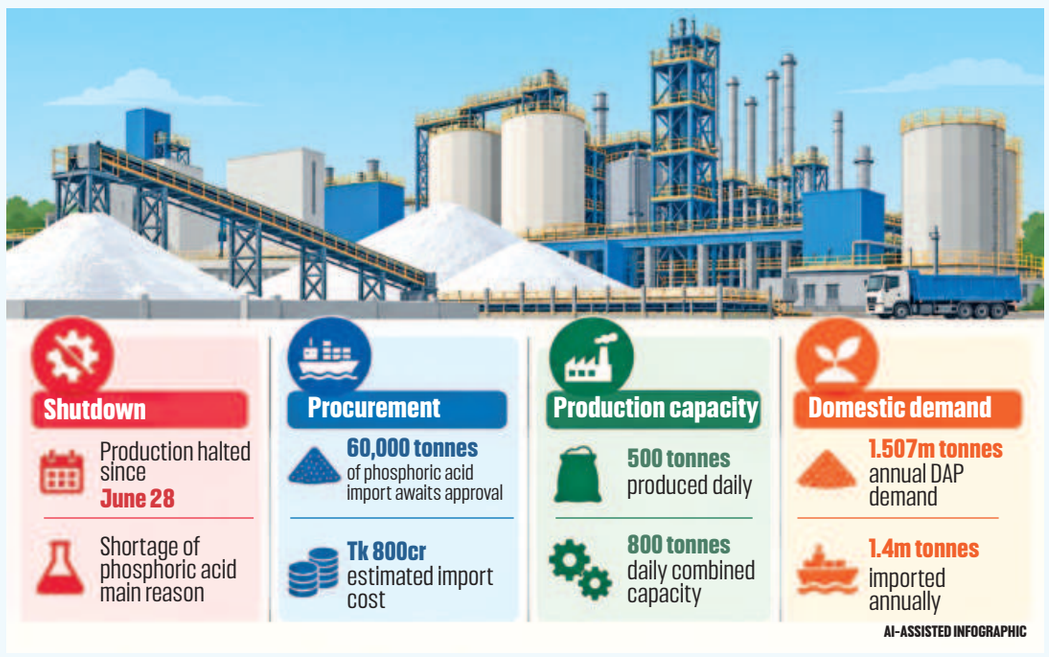
The implementation rate was 5.09 percent in the same period of FY26, 4.75 percent in FY25 and 7.5 percent in FY24.

ADP implementation this year was also slower than in either of the previous two fiscal years, when widespread administrative disruption following the 2024 mass uprising hampered development spending.



Spending was particularly low in the health sector, despite growing concerns about access to healthcare. The Medical Education and Family Welfare Division spent just 1.86 percent of its allocation, while the Health Services Division used only 1.78 percent, IMED data showed.

Md Deen Islam, a professor of economics at READ MORE ON B2



Country's only DAP fertiliser plant remains shut for 4 months

MOHAMMAD SUMAN

The country's only diammonium phosphate (DAP) fertiliser factory has been shut for nearly four months due to a shortage of phosphoric acid -- a key raw material -- with a government approval delay holding up fresh imports.

The DAP Fertilizer Company Limited (DAPFCL), located in Anwara upazila of Chattogram, suspended production on June 28.

The Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC) subsequently floated a tender to procure 60,000 tonnes of phosphoric acid in three lots, but the purchase is still awaiting government approval.

According to DAPFCL, the estimated cost of procuring the raw material is $64.8 million, equivalent to around Tk 800 crore. Each lot comprises 20,000 tonnes.

The lowest bids for the three lots were $1,079, $1,087 and $1,071.90 per tonne, respectively.

Officials said phosphoric acid prices had risen since March amid tensions in the Middle East, a major market for the chemical. Bangladesh purchased the raw material at around $750 per tonne at the beginning of this year, they added.

Mainul Haque, managing director of DAPFCL, told The Daily Star that the factory had set a production target of around 100,000 tonnes for the current fiscal year but had been unable to produce any fertiliser over the past four months.

"We have been sourcing ammonia from KAFCO and Chattogram Urea Fertilizer Company Limited (CUFL), but phosphoric acid depends on imports and is procured through tenders. BCIC conducts the tender process, and we do not know why it has yet to complete the import of the raw material," he said.

Md Moniruzzaman, BCIC's director (commercial, production and research) said, "The proposal to purchase 60,000 tonnes of phosphoric acid through three lots at the lowest bids had been forwarded through the Ministry of Industries and was awaiting government approval."

He said the government had been supplying gas to most fertiliser factories to keep production running in response to domestic demand.

Moniruzzaman noted that of the country's six major fertiliser factories, CUFL, Karnaphuli Fertilizer Company Limited (KAFCO), Shahjalal Fertilizer Company Limited and Ghorashal were receiving gas.

Jamuna had also received gas until Sunday, he said.

Factory officials said DAPFCL had also remained shut for at least a month in April and May due to gas shortages. READ MORE ON B2

BRAC Bank to issue country's first Tk 1,000cr green bond

The three-year zero-coupon paper targets 7.5% return

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

BRAC Bank is set to issue a Tk 1,000 crore green bond, the first in the country to align with Bangladesh Bank's policy on green bond financing for banks and financial institutions, as the private lender seeks to channel long-term money into renewable energy and energy-efficient industry.

The three-year bond will be senior, unsecured, non-convertible, fully redeemable and zero-coupon, the bank said at a press conference in Dhaka yesterday.

Each bond will carry a face value of Tk 10 lakh and will be offered to corporate institutions and individual investors. Eligible company provident and gratuity funds may also invest, subject to regulatory and investment requirements.

Proceeds will go to eligible green projects, including renewable energy, green buildings and industrial energy-efficiency initiatives.

The bank said the framework follows the International Capital Market Association's Green Bond Principles and has received a second-party opinion from S&P Global Ratings. It also said it expects the funds to contribute to four United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: affordable and clean energy (SDG 7), industry, innovation and infrastructure (SDG 9), sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), and climate action (SDG 13).

Tareq Refat Ullah Khan, managing director and CEO of BRAC Bank, said many factories were turning to renewable energy amid the global energy crisis and rising fuel prices, but such projects needed affordable, long-term financing.

"This green bond marks an important milestone in BRAC Bank's sustainable finance journey and represents a meaningful step towards deepening Bangladesh's capital market," he said.

He said the bank was targeting a return of 7.5 percent and that the tax treatment of zero-coupon bonds could make the paper attractive to investors.

He thanked the government and the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission for their support for the tax benefits. To ensure transparency, he added, the bank would conduct annual audits to verify that proceeds were used only for eligible green projects. A zero-coupon bond pays no periodic interest. Investors buy it at a discount and receive the full face value at maturity, with the difference being their return.

At a 7.5 percent yield, a Tk 10 lakh bond would be priced at roughly Tk 8.05 lakh at issue, assuming annual compounding.

For a banking sector that has struggled with a shortage of long-term funding, the issue is also a test of the domestic corporate bond market, which remains shallow, BRAC Bank officials said.

"Most bank lending to renewable energy and energy-efficiency projects is tied to tenors that are hard to match with short-term deposits, so a three-year instrument, though modest in length, could help ease that mismatch."

BRAC Bank said sustainable finance accounts for more than 60 percent of its loan portfolio. It has been named among Bangladesh Bank's top sustainable banks for five consecutive years and ranked first among Bangladeshi banks in Bloomberg's ESG Rating. It previously issued a social bond.



Tareq Refat Ullah Khan, *2nd from right,* managing director and CEO of BRAC Bank PLC, attends a programme marking the issuance of a Tk 1,000 crore green bond by the bank at Pan Pacific Sonargaon Dhaka yesterday. PHOTO: BRAC BANK



Md Alamgir Kabir, chairman of GPH Ispat Limited, presides over the company's 20th annual general meeting, held virtually yesterday. The meeting approved a 2 percent cash dividend for fiscal year 2025-2026. PHOTO: GPH ISPAT

GPH Ispat approves 2% cash dividend for FY26

STAR BUSINESS DESK

GPH Ispat Limited has approved a 2 percent cash dividend for the fiscal year 2025-2026.

The approval was given at the company's 20th annual general meeting (AGM), held virtually yesterday.

Md Alamgir Kabir, chairman of the company, presided over the meeting, according to a press release.

Alamgir said there was strong potential for long-term growth in demand for quality steel products, driven by Bangladesh's infrastructure development, urbanisation, industrialisation and expanding economic activities.

He added that as macroeconomic conditions improve, inflation eases, political stability returns, and the construction and infrastructure sectors regain momentum, steel demand is likely to rise. To capitalise on this potential, GPH Ispat is focusing on better utilisation of production capacity, technological expertise, quality control and commercial capability.

Describing the company's overall operations in FY2025-26, Mohammed Jahangir Alam, group chairman and managing director, said the company faced challenges including inflation, high interest rates, rising fuel costs, working capital shortages and adverse banking conditions.

"Slowed public and private infrastructure and housing investments kept construction activity sluggish. Excess steel industry capacity and intense competition created severe price pressure, while limited and irregular natural gas supply disrupted production," he said.

"Amid this climate, GPH Ispat maintained continuous factory operations, aligned production and sales with market demand through strict cost control, and upheld product quality and customer trust," he added.

Md Mosharraf Hossain, company secretary, moderated the meeting.

A large number of shareholders attended the meeting from across the country. They approved the financial statements for the year ended June 30, 2026, along with the related audit report and the board of directors' report.

Mohammed Jahangir Alam was reappointed as managing director for five years. Independent director Rezina Parveen was appointed for three years, while Safiul Alam Khan Chowdhury was reappointed for three years.

Among others, Mohammed Almas Shimul, additional managing director of the company; Mohammad Ashrafuzzaman, Md Abdul Ahad, Md Azizul Hoque, Sadman Syka Sefa, Salehin Musfique Sadaf and Saiham Sadik Pial, directors; Safiul Alam Khan Chowdhury and Rezina Parveen, independent directors; Mukter Hossain Talukder, group chief executive officer; HM Ashrafuzzaman, group chief financial officer; and Md Atiqur Rahman, chief financial officer, were also present.

bKash wins two awards at Money Awards 2026

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Country's leading digital financial service provider, bKash Limited, has won a Gold and a Silver award at The Money Awards 2026 for its efforts to promote financial inclusion among small merchants and accelerate Bangladesh's transition to a cashless economy.

The awards were presented at a ceremony in Las Vegas, US recently, according to a press release.

The mobile financial services provider received the Gold Award in the 'Payments – Financial Inclusion' category for its efforts to bring small and micro-entrepreneurs from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds into the formal financial system through accessible digital payment solutions.

In the top-tier 'Diamond' category, bKash secured the Silver Award for building an interconnected transaction ecosystem between consumers and merchants, facilitating everyday digital payments and advancing the country's cashless agenda.

Country's only

FROM PAGE B1

The current shutdown, however, has been caused by a lack of raw materials.

Even after approval for the import is secured, it could take another one and a half to two months for the factory to resume production, they said.

The plant typically produces around 500 tonnes of fertiliser a day using imported phosphoric acid and ammonia supplied by Kafco and CUFL. It has two production units with a combined capacity of 800 tonnes per day.

Established to meet domestic demand for nitrogen- and phosphorus-based fertilisers, DAPFCL has been in commercial operation since 2006 under BCIC, which operates under the Ministry of Industries.

Bangladesh relies heavily on imports to meet its DAP fertiliser demand. According to BCIC and the Ministry of Agriculture, annual demand for DAP stands at around 1.507 million tonnes, while approximately 1.4 million tonnes are imported.

BB to relax

FROM PAGE B1

source said. Most of the lenders have already approved the funding at their board meetings.

The proposed rescue plan has, however, exposed differences among lenders over how to handle City Group's financial distress.

A central bank official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Bank Asia, BRAC Bank and Eastern Bank PLC had sought to withdraw from the revival plan and pursue legal action against the group.

Representatives of the three banks were invited to yesterday's meeting and urged to join the rescue effort, the official said.

Meanwhile, some lenders, including HSBC, have already classified City Group's loans as defaulted. The meeting source said other banks would also have to classify the loans in October under normal banking rules, requiring them to make provisions against them.

The lenders would reschedule the group's existing loans only if it made a down payment, with no exceptions. "The client is not in a position to pay, so the banks cannot reschedule the loans," the source said.

A managing director of a private commercial bank said the BB had not agreed to extend the exemption to all City Group companies and had asked the lenders to select five entities.

Opening letters of credit for those five companies would require approval from the finance ministry, which the BB could not grant on its own, he said. "BB has promised to pursue it with the ministry, fully sincerely," he added.

The group's importance to the domestic market for essential commodities is another argument for the proposed intervention.

The chief executive of another bank, who requested anonymity, said City Group accounted for roughly 30 percent of the sugar market, 40 percent of the edible oil market and 30 percent of other commodities.

"Roughly a third of the market could vanish suddenly (if City Group cannot operate)," he said. "In such a crisis, people exploit shortages and raise prices, and the poor suffer most. That is a major motivation, not only the banks' own losses."

He also said the group had used foreign currency to import machinery, which the BB views as a national asset.

The central bank had previously instructed banks not to classify City Group's loans as defaulted until last September. With that deadline having passed, several lenders have begun classifying the loans.

Yesterday's meeting was also attended by BB Deputy Governors Kabir Ahmed and Sarwar Hossain, along with City Group Managing Director Md Hasan.

Bank representatives included Association of Bankers, Bangladesh Chairman and City Bank Managing Director Masrur Arefin, as well as the managing directors of Mutual Trust Bank, Bank Asia, BRAC Bank, Prime Bank, EBL, Pubali Bank and Southeast Bank, among others.

Syed Mahbubur Rahman, managing director of Mutual Trust Bank, told The Daily Star that City Group had never defaulted before and that there were no allegations against it.

"Everyone wants the group to overcome its difficulties and recover," he said, adding that all banks wanted to support the conglomerate, although its loans would need to be restructured or rescheduled.

The central bank has also advised lenders against taking decisions that could further worsen the group's situation, he said.

Mahbubur pointed to the widespread use of City Group's Teer-branded products in households across the country.

Building a business group of comparable scale would take considerable time, he said.

The group's products have become less available in the market because of its financial difficulties, but support could help it regain its former position, he added.

According to data, a large share of City Group's borrowings is concentrated among a few lenders, including HSBC, Standard Chartered, City Bank, United Commercial Bank (UCB), EBL and BRAC Bank.

Japanese firms

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The companies are investing mainly in readymade garments (RMG) and consumer goods, he said, as a large and growing middle-income population drives demand.

"Mitsubishi and Toyota, for example, have already approached the government for help with producing cars in Bangladesh. Japanese firms are also interested in fast-moving consumer goods and food processing," he added.

According to Kazuiki, the domestic market is the main attraction.

He said that Japan has a long-term plan for Bangladesh, which explains why the close relationship between the two countries is being emphasised during Prime Minister Tarique Rahman's visit.

"Japan is now focused on Bangladesh as a market in its own right, rather than using the country as a gateway to other markets," Kazuiki added.

Tareq Rafi Bhuiyan (Jun), the immediate past president of JBCCI, said Big B, or the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP), was adopted mainly with Bangladesh's market in mind. Regional issues are now also being discussed to some extent under the FOIP framework.

He said that several major projects were also planned with the domestic market in mind, including the third terminal at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka, the deep-sea port and power plants at Matarbari, and the Japanese economic zone at Araihazar.

Matarbari also has strategic importance, as the port is intended to serve as a hub linking the Indian subcontinent with ASEAN and East Asian countries, including Japan.

In July, the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) launched a dedicated Japan desk to tap the market's potential.

BGMEA President Mahmud Hasan Khan said Bangladesh's apparel exports to Japan have already exceeded $1 billion, but there is considerable scope to increase them further.

He stressed the need for single-stage rules of origin under the agreement, which he said would make exports simpler and cheaper.

Currently, about 98 percent of Bangladeshi goods enter Japan duty-free under the least developed country (LDC) category. Japan is the only Asian country where Bangladesh's exports have exceeded $1 billion over the past decade.

Annual exports to Japan have topped $1 billion since the fiscal year 2015-16, while two-way trade exceeded $3 billion in FY18, according to the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB).

Bangladesh imports iron and steel, vehicles and accessories, ships, machinery, mineral fuels, medical and surgical instruments, plastics and electrical machinery from Japan, according to Bangladesh Bank data.

Industry people say the "China plus one" strategy adopted by industrialised countries has made the South Asia region a natural destination for investment. They point to South Asia's economy of nearly $5 trillion, a population of almost 2 billion, a largely young workforce and a strategic location.

Business leaders say more than 350 Japanese companies now operate in Bangladesh across trading, manufacturing and infrastructure.

Japanese manufacturers, from motorcycle makers to clothing firms, create jobs and help upgrade technology. Small and medium-sized Japanese enterprises are also exploring opportunities in Bangladesh's information technology, logistics and other service sectors.

Business leaders in both countries expect more Japanese companies to enter Bangladesh once the EPA comes into force.

Websites still vulnerable despite cyber warnings

FROM PAGE B1

It advised them to check which PHP versions are running on public-facing applications, servers, containers and hosting environments.

The agency recommended upgrading vulnerable versions to secure releases, applying verified patches and replacing unsupported versions with ones that are still maintained.

Organisations unable to install patches immediately should restrict public access through virtual private networks, allow connections only from approved IP addresses or remove unnecessary internet exposure, the alert said.

CIRT also advised organisations to check server logs for suspicious requests, unexpected processes, unauthorised file changes and unusual outgoing connections. Those using managed or shared hosting should work with their providers to ensure PHP is updated.

Temporary access restrictions can reduce the risk of attacks but cannot replace security updates, the agency warned.

It stressed that organisations remain responsible for securing their applications and infrastructure even when third-party providers host or manage them. Those that have already applied fixes should also verify that their live systems are running the updated versions.

"Organisations should not delay remediation until a security incident occurs," the alert said, urging those that had received earlier notifications to act without further delay.

DIGITAL SERVICES DISRUPTED

The vulnerability has already disrupted digital services in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh Bank restored its website at 8am yesterday after keeping it offline for two and a half days.

On Saturday morning, the websites of six banks were offline. The websites of IFIC Bank, Standard Islami Bank and SBAC Bank were back online by Saturday evening. Those of Agrani Bank, Janata Bank and Bengal Commercial Bank remained offline until Sunday, when they were restored.

The land ministry also suspended digital services on land.gov.bd for about 36 hours from midnight on October 22, following CIRT's advisory.

The PHP2Shell vulnerabilities could allow attackers to run malicious code on affected servers without authentication. Researchers have also warned that attackers may be able to access data stored in a website's memory, including passwords, authentication tokens and application programming interface (API) keys.

As the vulnerabilities affect PHP itself rather than individual website code, applications could remain at risk even if their developers have followed good coding practices.

PHP released emergency security fixes on October 21. However, a related vulnerability disclosed on October 23 also affects the patched versions and is expected to require another update in a subsequent regular release, according to the earlier report.

Security researchers at Wiz estimate that around 70 percent of websites worldwide could be affected.

Governments in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, France, Denmark and Finland have also taken some online services offline as a precaution.

ADP spending hits 17-year low in Q1

FROM PAGE B1

the University of Dhaka, said the slow pace of ADP implementation was worrying because public investment plays a key role in driving domestic demand.

"If public spending falls short of planned levels, domestic demand will weaken, and economic growth will slow," he said.

Industries such as construction, cement and logistics depend directly on public investment and could suffer if government spending remains low, he added.

Weak implementation could also discourage private investment by undermining confidence in the government's ability to carry out its plans.

"If the private sector sees that the government cannot implement its plans, it sends the wrong signal. Investors may become more cautious and uncertain about whether to invest under these circumstances," Deen said.

Delays in major development projects could also increase costs and reduce their economic benefits, he said.

"Many projects may initially have a positive net benefit, meaning their benefits exceed their costs. But delays and rising costs can reduce those benefits," he said.

Delays in power and transport projects could also raise business costs and reduce private-sector productivity.

"If these projects are delayed or not completed properly and on time, the cost of doing business will rise, and productivity will fall. This could affect private-sector jobs and create further challenges," he said.

Deen warned that the new government needed to reverse the downward trend early in its tenure to avoid these risks.

"If the new government fails to reverse this downward trend early in its tenure, I am concerned that these risks could materialise," he added.

Ashikur Rahman, principal economist at the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh (PRI), shared these concerns, saying the slow pace of ADP implementation reflected persistent weaknesses in government agencies' ability to carry out projects.

"The expected improvement in implementation capacity has not materialised, suggesting that government agencies continue to struggle to deliver on their budget commitments," he said.

He said the fact that the implementation rate had fallen below the level recorded under the interim government was particularly concerning, as agencies continued to miss their development targets.

"Budget allocations can deliver their intended economic benefits only when the money is spent on time, and projects are completed effectively," he said.

Ashikur said improving ADP implementation should be a priority as the economy needs fresh momentum.

"We cannot allow government agencies to remain stuck in an inefficient working mode when the economy urgently needs renewed momentum. Addressing this weakness must be a priority," he added.

Nagad users to get 10% discount on Novoair tickets

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Nagad Limited, the digital financial service of the Bangladesh Postal Department, has signed an agreement with Novoair, a private airline in Bangladesh, to make air travel more affordable and convenient for customers.

Mohammad Shahin Sarwar Bhuiyan, chief commercial officer of Nagad, and Md Saidur Rahman Dipu, head of business sales at Novoair, signed the agreement at Nagad's headquarters in Dhaka recently, according to a press release.

Under the agreement, Nagad users will get a 10 percent discount on the base fare for tickets to all Novoair destinations when paying through Nagad.

Speaking at the signing ceremony, Shahin said, "Our primary goal is to make our customers' lives easier and more affordable. We have partnered with Novoair to make air travel more accessible."



Md Saidur Rahman Dipu, head of business sales at Novoair, and Mohammad Shahin Sarwar Bhuiyan, chief commercial officer of Nagad Limited, pose for a photograph after signing the agreement at the latter's headquarters in Dhaka recently. PHOTO: NAGAD

"Through this initiative, Nagad users can now enjoy air travel at a more affordable cost," he added.

Sohel Majid, director of marketing and sales at Novoair, said, "Novoair has always been committed to providing the highest standard of service to its passengers. We are delighted to offer additional benefits to our customers through this partnership with Nagad."

Dhaka Bank opens 41st sub-branch in Ctg

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Dhaka Bank PLC yesterday opened its Katirhat sub-branch under the Hathazari branch in Chattogram.

This is the bank's 41st sub-branch, according to a press release.

AKM Shahnawaj, additional managing director of the bank, inaugurated the sub-branch as the chief guest.

Shahnawaj said that, in line with Dhaka Bank's vision, "Transforming Together", the bank is advancing its strategic goal of expanding its branch and sub-branch network across the country.

He further emphasised that the Dhaka Bank family remains committed to maintaining "Excellence in Banking", strengthening customer relationships, expanding innovative banking services and ensuring sustainable growth.

"The inauguration of the Katirhat sub-branch marks another significant milestone in the bank's continued journey of progress," he added.



AKM Shahnawaj, additional managing director of Dhaka Bank PLC, inaugurates the bank's 41st sub-branch under the Hathazari branch in Chattogram yesterday. PHOTO: DHAKA BANK

Md Jahangir Alam, senior executive vice-president and regional manager of the bank's Chattogram region; Md Altamas Nirjhar, executive vice-president and head of the general services division; Md Rashedul Alam, vice-president of the Katirhat Madrasa Operating Committee; Shahadat Hossain Chowdhury and Alamgir Zaman, former chairmen of Dhalai Union; and Mahbubul Alam Chowdhury, senior consultant at Apollo Imperial Hospital, among others, were also present.

বিমান বাংলাদেশ এয়ারলাইনস্ Biman BANGLADESH AIRLINES

HEAD OFFICE, BALAKA, KURMITOLA, DHAKA-1229, BANGLADESH, PHONE- 8901600-14, 8901680-94, FAX: 88-02-8901558, www.biman-airlines.com

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP)

Tender Ref: BG/FIN-FLEET/OPTIMIZATION/2026/01
Date of Issuance: October 25, 2026
Subject: Appointment of a Specialist Techno-Financial Consultant for 35 New Aircraft Integration, Fleet Modernization, Route Optimization, and Capital Structuring.

1. Introduction & Objective
Biman Bangladesh Airlines Ltd., is a public limited company whose 100% shares are owned by the Government of Bangladesh. It is run by a board of directors nominated by the Government of Bangladesh and also look after by the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism of the Government of Bangladesh. It is the national flag carrier of Bangladesh. It is currently running its aviation operation with 19 aircrafts. Biman has taken initiative for its strategic modernization and fleet expansion. It has entered into an agreement with Boeing to purchase twenty-five (25) modern commercial aircraft and with Airbus to purchase ten (10) commercial aircraft.
To navigate this transformation, Biman requires the immediate services of a reputable, globally recognized, and highly specialized aviation advisory firm. The selected consultant will conduct independent financial due diligence, optimize network and route architecture, and design a highly efficient, multi-tiered financing structure. Time is of the essence for this engagement. The consultant is required to submit an initial high-level executive report by late November 2026.

2. Scope of Work (SOW)
The selected consultant will deliver an integrated strategic and financial model structured across three (3) core pillars:
Pillar I: Fleet Integration & Asset Obsolescence Due Diligence
- **New Fleet Integration:** Conduct deep-dive operational and financial due diligence on the delivery schedules, contractual obligations, and capital commitments associated with the 35 forward-order aircraft.
- **Legacy Fleet Management:** Evaluate the existing active fleet of nineteen (19) aircraft to develop a phased decommissioning and retirement schedule synchronized with incoming deliveries. This includes assessing optimal financial utility until absolute economic obsolescence.
- **Capacity Gap Mitigation:** Identify capacity gaps and potential mismatches between aircraft type and route demand.

Pillar II: Route Network & Profitability Optimization
- **Network Restructuring:** Develop a data-driven route and network architecture centered on Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (DAC), evaluating the viability of existing routes and simulating new international long-haul and regional expansions.
- **Spill & Demand Modeling:** Conduct Origin and Destination (O&D) traffic simulations and competitive capacity assessments against foreign operators, while optimizing scheduling waves to maximize aircraft utilization rates.
- **Financial Profitability Vectors:**
  (i) Review and implement optimized pricing mechanisms designed to maximize Revenue per Available Seat Kilometer (RASK) and minimize Cost per Available Seat Kilometer (CASK).
  (ii) Review route-level revenues, operating costs, contribution margin and profitability (in place of pricing mechanism designed to maximize revenue.
  (iii) Asses passenger yield, load factors and revenue management practices.

Pillar III: Aircraft Financing & Capital Structuring
Biman expects to receive Sovereign Guarantee from the Government of Bangladesh, and received soft commitment from ECA for comprehensive financing (including Pre-Delivery Payments/PDP financing). Operating within this framework, the consultant will advise on the optimal financing mix across multiple options, including but not limited to the following:
- **Export Credit Agencies (ECAs):** Structure a comprehensive framework optimizing financing combinations from ECAs from both US and Europe to support both PDP and aircraft delivery financing.
- **Commercial Debt vs. PDP Financing:** Design debt profiles detailing the exact structure and scaling of Pre-Delivery Payment (PDP) financing relative to long-term structured commercial debt.
- **Sale-Leaseback (SLB) Integration:** Advise on the optimal proportion and structural mechanics of partial Sale-Leaseback (SLB) transactions to optimize balance sheet liquidity, optimize cash flow management, and mitigate asset residual value risks without relinquishing operational control.

3. Timelines & Deliverables
To accommodate high-level government scheduling, this engagement will operate on an accelerated timeline. Bidders must demonstrate the capacity to meet the following deadlines:

Milestone / Deliverable	Target Deadline
RFP Issuance	October 25, 2026
Submission of Consultant Proposals	November 2, 2026
Contract Award & Commencement	November 8, 2026
Draft Initial Executive Report & In-Person Presentation	December 10, 2026
Final Comprehensive Report	January 15, 2027

4. Proposal Submission Requirements
Bidders are required to submit separate Technical and Financial proposals, which must include:
a) **Corporate Track Record:** Evidence of comparable, successful mandates executed for national or regional flag carriers within the last five (5) years, specifically demonstrating successful structured ECA and SLB financing arrangements.
b) **Team Composition & Deployment:** Detailed resumes of the core project leads, guaranteeing the direct, active involvement of senior partners rather than the deployment of junior resources.
c) **Methodology & Toolsets:** A comprehensive explanation of the proprietary route-planning, network-simulation, and fleet-cost software models to be utilized throughout the mandate.
d) **Financial Quote:** A fixed-fee commercial proposal aligned with a milestone payment schedule, inclusive of all travel, modeling, advisory, tax and administrative expenses.

5. Evaluation Criteria
Proposals will be evaluated using a Quality and Cost-Based Selection (**QCBS**) framework consisting of a **70% Technical weight and 30% Financial weight**.
- **Technical Evaluation (70% total weight):** Bidders will be scored out of 100 points based on the following two key elements with m*inimum qualification threshold of 75 points*:
- **Technical Expertise & Specialized Agility (60%):** Demonstrable domain competency and successful track record in specialized aviation financing, ECA structures, and fleet optimization, alongside an agile corporate structure free of excessive bureaucratic overhead and proprietary tools and methodology.
- **Delivery Speed & Resource Commitment (40%):** Definitive institutional capability and resource allocation to meet the strict November deadline with executive-level clarity.
- **Financial Evaluation (30% total weight):** The lowest compliant financial bid will receive 100 financial points. Higher bids will be normalized inversely proportional to the lowest price.

6. Contact & Submission Portal
All proposal submissions, formal requests for clarification, and technical correspondence must be routed through the Chairman's Secretariat at Balaka.

By Order of the Board,

Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer
Biman Bangladesh Airlines Ltd.

ANNEXURE B: FINANCIAL BID FORM
(To be submitted by Bidders in a Separate Sealed Envelope marked "Financial Proposal")

Tender Ref: BG/FIN-FLEET/OPTIMIZATION/2026/01

Bidder Name: _____
1. Total Financial Bid Summary
The Bidder must state an **All-Inclusive Fixed Fee** for the successful execution of the entire Scope of Work (Pillars I through III) as defined in the RFP. This fee must be inclusive of all consultant remuneration, global travel, corporate overhead, out-of-pocket expenses, data-licensing fees, and administrative costs.

Fee Component	Amount (USD)	Amount (In Words)
Total Remuneration (Section 2 & 3)	$	
Total Overhead (Section 4)	$	
Gross All-Inclusive Fixed Fee	$	
Applicable Local Taxes/VAT (if any)	$	
TOTAL CONTRACT VALUE	**$**	

2. Breakdown of Remuneration Costs by SOW Pillars
To evaluate the commercial realism of the bid, please distribute your Gross Fixed Fee across the three main areas of execution:

Workstream Pillar	Allocated Fee (USD)	% of Total Fee
Pillar I: Fleet Integration & Asset Obsolescence Due Diligence	$	%
Pillar II: Route Network & Profitability Optimization	$	%
Pillar III: Aircraft Financing & Capital Structuring	$	%
TOTAL (Must Match Section 1 Total Remuneration)	**$**	**100%**

3. Resource Staffing & Remuneration Details

Bidders must provide transparency regarding the elite team deployed for this accelerated mandate. *Note: These figures are for evaluation purposes only; the contract remains strictly Fixed-Fee.*

Deployed Resource Name	Project Role / Area of Expertise	Estimated Total Man-Days	Blended Daily Rate (USD)	Total Cost Contribution (USD)
e.g., xxx xxxx	*Lead Partner - Aviation Finance*			$
				$
				$
				$
				$
TOTALS		_____ **Days**	**Must Match Section 1 Total Remuneration)**	**$**

Authorized Signatory Stamp & Date:

(Name, Title, and Company Seal of the Bidder's Authorized Representative)

GD-2581

What happens after LDC graduation?

Past graduates saw mixed outcomes shaped by exports, trade preferences, diversification

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Bangladesh is seeking to defer its LDC graduation even as it prepares for the transition, amid concerns over export competitiveness and preferential market access. How have the eight countries that graduated before it fared, and what lessons do their experiences hold for Bangladesh?

A study by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP) found that post-graduation outcomes varied across the eight countries, depending largely on their economic structures, reliance on trade preferences and sources of development finance.

The loss of LDC status did not necessarily trigger a major economic shock. The impact was limited in countries whose exports relied little on LDC-specific preferences, particularly those exporting minerals, hydrocarbons and cocoa, or products already entering major markets at zero or low most favoured nation (MFN) tariffs.

Botswana and Equatorial Guinea, for instance, faced limited exposure to preference erosion because their exports were dominated by natural resources. Botswana had built domestic fiscal capacity through diamond revenues, while Equatorial Guinea's high hydrocarbon income had reduced its reliance on concessional finance and grant-based official development assistance (ODA).

However, both countries remained dependent on natural resources, highlighting the limits of graduation without economic diversification.

São Tomé and Príncipe, in Central Africa, was also expected to face little direct trade shock because cocoa already entered many markets duty-free. However, it remained reliant on cocoa, external finance and an emerging tourism sector.

By contrast, Cabo Verde and the Maldives faced greater risks from preference erosion because fish and processed fish products faced positive MFN tariffs in the European Union (EU) market.

Even in these countries, the overall impact was mitigated by the small share of merchandise exports in total external earnings and the dominance of services, particularly tourism. Transition periods, alternative preference schemes, flexible rules of origin, certification and market positioning also helped cushion the effects.

Nevertheless, both remained exposed to tourism-related risks. Cabo Verde was also vulnerable to disruptions in fisheries, remittances and climate shocks, while the Maldives remained heavily dependent on tourism.

Samoa and Vanuatu retained access to Australia and New Zealand through regional trade arrangements that were not conditional on LDC status. However, both remained exposed to changes in development finance, tourism, fisheries, remittances and climate shocks.

The study noted that the serious external disruptions Samoa and Vanuatu experienced after graduation stemmed mainly from natural disasters, the Covid-19 pandemic and the collapse of tourism, rather than the loss of trade preferences.

Bhutan's trade and development finance profile was anchored largely in its relationship with India, limiting its direct dependence on LDC-specific support. However, it continued to rely on hydropower and trade centred on India.

Changes in development finance did not generally lead to a sudden withdrawal of support, the study found. Cabo Verde, Samoa, Vanuatu and São Tomé and Príncipe remained more exposed to such changes, but graduation typically involved a longer transition in which some support measures were phased out, replaced or extended.

Overall, graduation mattered more where countries actively used LDC-specific support in sectors exposed to tariff preference erosion or in areas such as climate finance and Aid for Trade. Its effects were less pronounced where exports already entered markets duty-free, regional agreements preserved market access, or aid allocations depended mainly on income, vulnerability, bilateral ties or small island developing state considerations.

The study identified limited productive transformation before graduation as a more persistent challenge than the loss of LDC benefits alone.

It also cautioned against drawing direct parallels between past graduates and countries preparing to graduate now. Asian LDCs with manufacturing-led economies and deep integration into global production networks, such as Bangladesh and Cambodia, generally have much higher trade preference utilisation rates than small island economies dependent on services or countries driven by natural resources.

For countries heavily reliant on the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) or duty-free market access, losing preferential access could create a significant competitiveness shock, particularly where labour-intensive textiles and garments underpin the economy.

The eventual outcomes will depend on the mitigation measures adopted before graduation, the quality of domestic reforms and the broader external environment, the study said.

Mohammad Abdur Razzaque, chairman of Dhaka-based think tank Research and Policy Integration for Development (RAPID), was one of the researchers involved in the study.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Razzaque said two of the eight countries were rich in natural resources but could not export those resources.

Bangladesh's situation is different, as it will need to sustain export growth after graduation, he said.

Razzaque said Bangladesh should follow the government's Smooth Transition Strategy (STS) for LDC graduation, which emphasises retaining preferential market access through trade agreements with major trading partners.

Life after LDC: Outcomes not uniform

Country	The impact of graduation
Botswana	Limited impact due to resource exports
Equatorial Guinea	Limited impact, hydrocarbon exports
São Tomé and Príncipe	Little trade shock, cocoa duty-free
Cabo Verde	Greater risks, fish face EU tariffs
Maldives	Greater risks, fish face EU tariffs
Bhutan	Limited impact, India-centred trade
Samoa	Exposed to shocks, not trade loss
Vanuatu	Exposed to shocks, not trade loss



THE KEY LESSON
The loss of LDC status did not necessarily trigger a major economic shock

AI-ASSISTED INFOGRAPHIC

Pharma exports need stronger logistics to compete globally

SYED ERSHAD AHMED

The United States' decision to apply a zero additional tariff rate to specified specialty pharmaceutical products and associated ingredients from Bangladesh presents a significant opportunity. The US Department of Commerce's September 23 notice lists Bangladesh among the jurisdictions eligible for the zero Section 232 tariff rate on specified products, including orphan medicines, nuclear medicines, plasma-derived therapies, fertility drugs, cell and gene therapies, antibody-drug conjugates, certain medical countermeasures and animal health products.

This development should be viewed not simply as a tariff issue, but as an opportunity to strengthen Bangladesh's ability to serve a demanding global healthcare market. The exemption is product-specific and subject to US rules. Nevertheless, it reinforces the importance of developing a supply chain capable of protecting pharmaceutical quality from the factory to the final destination.

Pharmaceutical logistics is fundamentally different from ordinary cargo movement. Some products can tolerate delays; many medicines, vaccines, biological materials and other temperature-sensitive products cannot. Their quality may depend on maintaining specified conditions throughout transportation, storage, handling and delivery. A shipment can leave a modern manufacturing plant in perfect condition and still be compromised by a temperature excursion, excessive exposure on the airport apron, inadequate storage or a poorly controlled handover. This is why Bangladesh needs to treat pharmaceutical logistics as a high-integrity supply chain, not merely an airport cargo function. The International Air Transport Association's (IATA) pharmaceutical logistics standards emphasise temperature control, appropriate equipment and facilities, trained personnel, documentation, traceability, risk management and coordinated handling across the supply chain. Its CEIV Pharma programme provides a recognised framework covering infrastructure, equipment, quality management, training, warehousing, ground transportation and aircraft handling.



The next competitive advantage for Bangladesh's pharmaceutical exports will depend on how safely, quickly and reliably medicines reach patients

For Bangladesh, an immediate priority should be developing dedicated pharmaceutical logistics capabilities at the country's principal air cargo gateway. This should include validated temperature-controlled storage for different product requirements, rapid transfer between aircraft and storage, reliable backup power, temperature mapping and continuous monitoring, secure handling areas, calibrated sensors and clear procedures for temperature excursions.

The system should also support active and passive temperature-controlled packaging, data loggers, appropriate unit load device handling and specialised vehicles so cargo is not unnecessarily exposed to ambient conditions. Dedicated fast-track procedures for customs clearance would further reduce dwell time. High-value and sensitive medicines require strong physical security, controlled access, accurate documentation and end-to-end shipment visibility.

Training is equally important. Airlines, ground handlers, freight forwarders, customs personnel, warehouse operators and trucking companies should understand pharmaceutical handling procedures. Standard operating procedures and service-level agreements should define responsibilities at every handover. Digital tracking and electronic documentation can further strengthen traceability and reduce avoidable delays. IATA specifically identifies infrastructure, temperature monitoring, trained personnel, documentation, transportation and ground handling as important elements of pharmaceutical logistics. Singapore offers a useful benchmark. Its pharmaceutical and biomedical industries are supported by advanced manufacturing, global connectivity, regulatory capability and specialised logistics services. Bangladesh does not need to replicate Singapore, but it can learn from the principle that high-value healthcare manufacturing requires equally high-integrity logistics.

The US tariff development therefore presents Bangladesh with more than a market-access opportunity. It is a reminder that competitive pharmaceutical exports depend on the entire supply chain. Investment in cold-chain infrastructure, trained personnel, secure cargo facilities, reliable power, digital monitoring and internationally aligned operating standards can help Bangladesh protect product integrity and build confidence among global buyers.

For a country seeking to expand pharmaceutical exports, the next competitive advantage may not come only from what is manufactured inside the factory. It will also depend on how safely, quickly and reliably that product reaches the patient.

The writer is former president of FICCI and AmCham Bangladesh

Afghan trade halt hits Pakistan's pharma exports

ANN/DAWN

After contracting by 30.26 percent in FY26, Pakistan's pharmaceutical exports continued to decline, falling 25.53 percent in value in the first quarter of 2026-27.

The industry largely attributes the drop to disrupted trade with Afghanistan, once one of the country's main medicine markets.

Pakistan Bureau of Statistics data showed that pharmaceutical exports fell to $319.012 million in FY26 from $457.456 million in FY25, a drop of $138.444 million, while export volumes declined 26.14 percent to 83,104 tonnes from 112,517 tonnes.

Pharmaceutical exports remained under pressure in the first quarter of FY27, with proceeds falling 25.53 percent to $73.301 million from $98.428 million in the same period last year.

Export volumes fell 31.40 percent in the first quarter of FY27, dropping from 23,924 tonnes to 16,410 tonnes, a reduction of 7,514 tonnes, showing a sharper decline in quantity than in value in both periods; average export value per tonne rose about 8.6 percent in the first quarter, from around $4,115 to $4,469, but fell 5.6pc in FY26, from roughly $4,065 to $3,838, with these averages reflecting changes in the mix of products exported rather than necessarily changes in medicine prices.

Sri Lanka seeks faster green energy shift after oil shocks

AFP, *Colombo*

Sri Lanka is determined to accelerate its transition to renewable energy spurred by soaring oil prices, but faces major constraints, its energy minister told AFP.

"There are some wake-up calls... pushing us to move more to renewable energy," Anura Karunathilaka said.

"If we can get as much as possible from renewable energy, that would be our policy in the next few years."

The island nation, which imports all its oil and gas needs, has been hit hard since the US and Israel launched their war on Iran, which in turn choked off the strategically critical Strait of Hormuz.

Sharp increases in fuel, gas and electricity prices, rationing and inflation at its highest in three years have dealt a painful blow to an economy only just recovering from its worst-ever crisis in 2022.

The state and the public have paid a heavy price. The energy ministry says the government has at times spent up to 30 percent of its foreign exchange reserves in a single month to pay for fossil fuel imports.

Sri Lanka's energy transition targets were set before the war.

By 2030, the country aims to generate 70 percent of its electricity from renewable sources, up from around 60 percent currently, including about 40 percent from hydropower.

PROMISE TO THE PEOPLE

"We will probably have to go beyond 70 percent," Karunathilaka said.

But the transition is proving more complicated than expected.

Some communities oppose wind turbines.

The island has enormous potential for wind power -- estimated at 30 gigawatts-- but anger is growing on the northwestern Mannar peninsula, where residents blame turbines operating since 2020 for causing floods, driving fish away and threatening migratory birds.

The minister said he had listened to their concerns. "We have promised the people of Mannar... that only projects already approved or under construction will go ahead," he said, adding that future wind farms would be built elsewhere.

Another obstacle is technical.

"The problem is the constraint in the transmission lines, availability and also control of the grid, as well as fluctuations in supply and demand," Karunathilaka said.

"From next year onwards, we have planned to enhance our transmission capacity, adding five major transmission network lines."

But that will not be enough.

The success of solar power, particularly the installation of photovoltaic panels on homes and businesses, has created sharp fluctuations in electricity supply, which often exceeds demand during daylight hours.

PRICING CHANGES

This month a six-hour blackout struck across the island after the national grid tripped, possibly because solar power generation exceeded consumption.

"Sometimes we have to curtail certain solar power plants to maintain the stability of the system. That is why some people have the perception that the government is not encouraging solar power," Karunathilaka said.

"But that is not true."

By 2029, the government hopes to increase its solar power generation capacity to nearly 4,400 megawatts, a 388 percent jump from 2024, he said.

However, he added that the government would have to change how solar electricity was priced.

Under the existing system, private producers can feed electricity into the grid during the day, when generation is at its peak and demand is low, then draw back the same amount for free at night, when electricity is more expensive.

The arrangement is financially unsustainable for a fragile economy, the minister said.

"The additional cost is borne by the state," he said. "We think it is unfair to pass that burden on to the general public, so we will propose a new financial model that is fair to both solar producers and consumers."

The government also plans to expand electricity storage using batteries, Karunathilaka said.



Drivers and their auto-rickshaws queue at a Ceylon Petroleum Corporation fuel station in Colombo on March 11, 2022, as they wait to refuel. PHOTO: AFP/FILE

UK consumer confidence tumbles

REUTERS

British consumer confidence has suffered its sharpest month-on-month fall since early in the Covid-19 pandemic as economic worries deepen, according to a survey that created an unwelcome backdrop for finance minister John Healey's budget next week.

GfK's consumer confidence index dropped 11 points to -24 in October, its lowest since April and below all the forecasts from economists a Reuters poll. September's reading of -13 was the highest since August 2024.

The drop was biggest from one month to the next since April 2020, just after Britain entered its first coronavirus lockdown. Excluding the pandemic, the last drop on this scale followed the June 2016 Brexit vote.

GfK said no single factor explained the slump and pointed instead to rising inflation, the conflict in the Middle East and the broader squeeze on household budgets.

Healey has said he wants to give households and businesses "breathing space" in his budget. He has struck an upbeat tone on the economy, pointing to growth in the first half of the year that was jointly the fastest in the Group of Seven. But surveys this month from S&P Global and LSEG/Ipsos have also shown weaker consumer sentiment, undoing a recovery that took hold around the time Andy Burnham became prime minister.

"The speed of this deterioration is alarming," said Neil Bellamy, consumer insights director at GfK.

Households' views of the wider economy and their appetite for big-ticket purchases deteriorated sharply with the major purchase index falling to its lowest in more than two years.