

Connecting local savings with enterprise finance

MD ALTAF HOSSAIN — Islami Bank Bangladesh PLC

Agent outlets can help rural customers turn regular banking activity into a foundation for business finance. In a conversation with The Daily Star, Md Altaf Hossain, acting managing director of Islami Bank Bangladesh PLC, discusses investment assessment, repayment arrangements and the role of the bank's RDS programme in reaching women.

THE DAILY STAR (TDS): How is agent banking supporting local enterprise, and what services are available?

MD ALTAF HOSSAIN (MAH): Rural customers are becoming more financially active, using formal channels to turn savings and remittance income into working capital and investment.

Entrepreneurs can open accounts, deposit and withdraw money, transfer funds, receive remittances, pay bills and obtain statements. Eligible customers can also access collateral-free investment facilities under RDS. Agents assist with transactions and documentation; branches and investment teams handle appraisal, risk assessment, eligibility verification and final approval.

TDS: What must applicants prepare, and how are businesses with limited records assessed?

MAH: For larger investment requests, agents help with initial applications and refer customers to the relevant branch or investment team. Documents may include national identity cards, photographs, business and income information, transaction records and relevant trade documents. Processing time depends on completeness, business complexity and due diligence.

We assess business activity, cash flow, repayment capacity and financial behaviour. Savings, remittances and transaction histories provide evidence of income patterns and repayment capacity when formal records are limited.

> **Our objective is to ensure that finance supports the business's cash flow rather than becoming a pressure on it.**
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> **Md Altaf Hossain**
> Managing Director (Acting)
> Islami Bank Bangladesh PLC

TDS: How do investment terms accommodate seasonal or uneven income?

MAH: Eligible micro and small businesses can access RDS, while more structured financing can be processed through branches. Investment size and repayment arrangements reflect the business's nature, scale and cash-flow cycle.

Where appropriate, repayments can align with income cycles. Costs follow applicable Shariah-based products and regulatory frameworks. Our objective is to ensure that finance supports the business's cash flow rather than becoming a pressure on it.

TDS: What barriers do women entrepreneurs face?

MAH: Limited collateral, business records, mobility and financial information can restrict access. Our agent network brings services closer, while RDS offers collateral-free investment. Women account for around 94 percent of RDS members. We are also focusing on financial literacy and digital capability. Better access to markets, technology and formal documentation requires further collective effort.

TDS: How can customers verify terms or raise complaints?

MAH: Agents and official channels explain charges, investment terms, required documents and application status. Branches and relevant teams oversee investment matters. Customers can verify information and report misleading statements, unauthorised charges or service problems through branches, the contact centre and designated grievance channels.



Business finance needs more than transaction records

MD AHTESHAMUL HAQUE KHAN — Dutch-Bangla Bank PLC

Agent banking can connect local businesses with finance, but account activity alone cannot establish repayment capacity. In a conversation with The Daily Star, Md Ahteshamul Haque Khan, managing director and CEO of Dutch-Bangla Bank PLC, discusses credit assessment, barriers facing women entrepreneurs and the safeguards needed to protect customers.

THE DAILY STAR (TDS): How can agent banking support enterprise, and where does an agent's responsibility end?

MD AHTESHAMUL HAQUE KHAN (AHK): Rural customers who once relied solely on remittance withdrawals are now engaging in business financing. Stronger coordination among outlets, branches and lending teams can support this shift. Outlets offer account opening, deposits, withdrawals, transfers, remittances and other approved transactions. Agents provide guidance and referrals, while credit appraisal, lending decisions and approval remain with authorised bank officials.

TDS: What should applicants prepare, and how are businesses with limited records assessed?

AHK: Applicants generally need identification, a trade licence where applicable, bank statements, business information and details of existing liabilities. Collateral or guarantor documents may also be required. Processing time depends on document completeness, loan complexity and verification.

Limited formal records should not automatically exclude a viable entrepreneur from consideration for financing. We can examine sales, expenses, stock, supplier relationships, liabilities and business experience, supported by visits and independent checks. Savings and transaction histories provide additional insights. Remittances must be distinguished from business income as well.

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> **Md Ahteshamul Haque Khan**
> Managing Director and CEO
> Dutch-Bangla Bank PLC

TDS: How should financing reflect business needs and cash flows?

AHK: Working capital can fund inventory and raw materials, while term loans may support equipment or expansion. Agricultural and women-focused facilities can address other needs, subject to eligibility and lending conditions.

Loan amounts should reflect verified cash flow, business needs and repayment capacity. Agricultural repayments may be aligned with harvesting and sales where product terms permit.

TDS: What barriers do women entrepreneurs face?

AHK: Distance, limited collateral, inadequate records, restricted mobility and limited market information can impede access. Family responsibilities and social expectations add difficulties. Opportunities for support include identifying potential entrepreneurs, financial literacy sessions, application guidance and coordination with lending teams.

TDS: What safeguards should protect customers at agent outlets?

AHK: Customers should receive clear information on charges, financing terms, eligibility, repayment obligations and application status, alongside transaction evidence. They must never disclose PINs or confidential authentication credentials to agents or unauthorised persons. Problems should be reported through designated branches and official customer service channels. Complaints about misleading information, unauthorised charges or suspected fraud should be documented and investigated promptly.



