Global sourcing expo to begin in Dhaka on Nov 15

STAR BUSINESS DESK

The second edition of Global Sourcing Expo Dhaka will begin on November 15, bringing together around 200 companies from 12 sectors at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Exhibition Center in Dhaka.

Khandakar Abdul Muktadir, minister for commerce, industries, textiles and jute, is expected to inaugurate the three-day event as chief guest.

Mohammad Hasan Arif, vice-chairman of the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB), announced the details at a press briefing in Dhaka yesterday, according to a press release.

The expo will feature 12 sectors, up from eight at last year's inaugural event, as the EPB seeks to showcase Bangladesh's export potential and manufacturing capabilities.

The sectors include readymade garments and textiles; leather and leather goods; handicrafts and jute products; agriculture and agro-processed products; plastic products and kitchenware; furniture and home decor; pharmaceuticals; information and communication technology; paper and packaging; automobiles; light engineering; and ceramics and tableware.

To attract international buyers, the EPB has sought support from foreign diplomats stationed in Bangladesh and engaged commercial counsellors at Bangladesh's embassies and high commissions abroad to encourage overseas buyers to attend the expo.

The organisers expect the expo to create business opportunities between local suppliers and international buyers, help exporters explore new markets and strengthen Bangladesh's position in global sourcing networks.

Higher prices lift Unilever revenue

AFP, *London*

British consumer goods giant Unilever on Wednesday posted higher revenue in the third quarter as rising energy costs pushed the group to raise prices.

The maker of products ranging from Cif surface cleaner to Dove soap said sales increased nearly seven percent to 13.3 billion euros ($14.8 billion) in the July-September period.

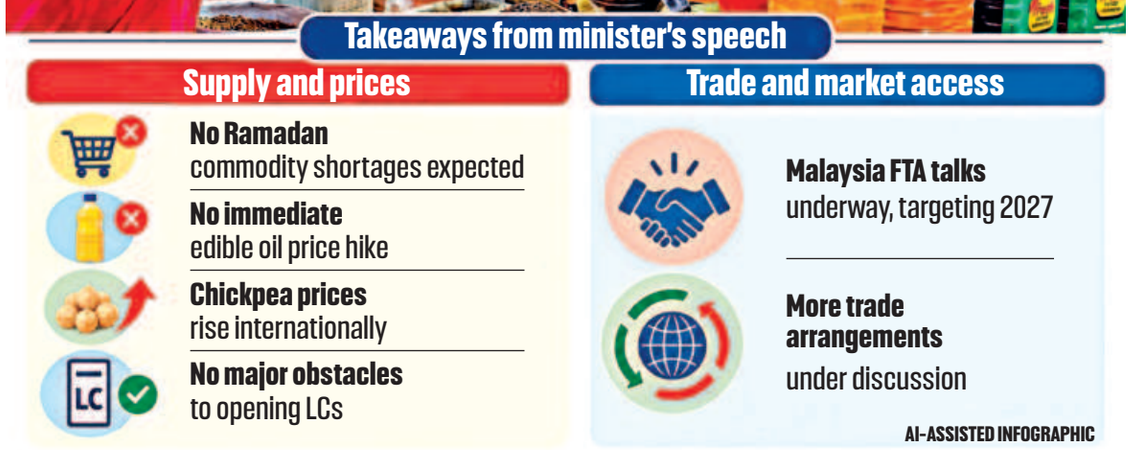
"We have delivered another quarter of competitive growth, led by continued strong volume delivery and a step up in price to offset the impact of higher commodity costs," chief executive Fernando Fernandez said in a statement.

Consumer brands are contending with higher inflation triggered by a surge in energy costs linked to the Middle East war.

Unilever slightly lifted its underlying volume growth outlook for the year, and reaffirmed its sales forecasts.

Third-quarter sales growth was spurred by its emerging markets division, including India, where Unilever has focused on expanding sales. Under Fernandez, the company is refocusing on its home and personal care businesses, an overhaul that includes cutting jobs and spinning off its food and ice cream divisions.





Sufficient supplies in pipeline ahead of Ramadan

Commerce minister says

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh faces no risk of essential commodity shortages ahead of Ramadan, as sufficient supplies are already in the import pipeline to meet normal demand during the month, Commerce Minister Khandakar Abdul Muktadir said yesterday.

The government also has no immediate plans to increase edible oil prices, he said.

The minister made the remarks while responding to journalists before a meeting with importers and business leaders representing trade bodies at the commerce ministry in Dhaka.

Muktadir said the government had reviewed the supply situation ahead of Ramadan, considering expected demand for import-dependent essentials, including edible oil, chickpeas, pulses and sugar.

He said sufficient quantities of the required goods were already in the import pipeline to maintain stable supplies.

However, fluctuations in international commodity prices and shipping freight rates remained important factors in determining import costs and domestic market prices, according to a statement from the commerce ministry.

The minister reiterated that the government had no plans to raise edible oil prices at present. Noting that chickpea prices had increased slightly in the international market, he said discussions were underway with importers. He also stressed that the government remained vigilant in ensuring uninterrupted supplies and market stability.

Asked whether businesses were facing difficulties opening letters of credit (LCs) to import goods, Muktadir said no major complaints or obstacles had been reported so far.

He assured importers that if they encountered difficulties involving LC margins or other banking issues, the ministry would discuss the matter with Bangladesh Bank and take the necessary steps.

According to recent data from the Bangladesh Trade and Tariff Commission (BTTC), imports of five major essentials -- edible oil, sugar, chickpeas, red lentils and dates -- increased between July 1 and October 25 compared with the same period a year earlier.

Import commitments, measured by the opening of LCs, also increased for several items, suggesting that supplies could receive further support from upcoming shipments, although international prices, import costs and domestic market conditions will remain crucial to keeping prices stable.

Imports of key Ramadan commodities increased year-on-year. Edible oil imports rose to 8.23 lakh tonnes from 7.05 lakh tonnes, while letters of credit (LCs) opened reached 8.05 lakh tonnes. Soybean seed imports increased by 1.13 lakh tonnes to 5.01 lakh tonnes.

Sugar imports grew to 6.87 lakh tonnes, with LCs at 8.10 lakh tonnes. Chickpea imports surged to 82,000 tonnes from 12,000 tonnes, while LCs reached 1.38 lakh tonnes. Red lentil imports rose to 1.22 lakh tonnes, with LCs at 1.14 lakh tonnes. Date imports increased to 11,000 tonnes from 4,000 tonnes.

Higher import volumes and LC openings have improved the supply outlook, but do not necessarily guarantee lower retail prices. Import costs and the pace at which shipments reach the market also influence domestic prices.

The BTTC review found that international prices of edible oil and chickpeas remained somewhat elevated, while red lentil prices had declined. It called for close monitoring of global market trends, import costs and domestic supply conditions.

The commission also noted that chickpeas and lentils currently faced no import duties or taxes. Reviewing and rationally adjusting the existing tariff structure for sugar and fruit imports could help keep market prices at tolerable levels, it said.

Muktadir also announced that formal negotiations on a proposed free trade agreement (FTA) with Malaysia had begun.

The first round of talks started last Tuesday and would play a significant role in expanding trade and investment between the two countries, he said. The government aims to conclude negotiations and sign the agreement by December 2027.

Discussions on preferential trade arrangements are also underway with other key trading partners, including the United Arab Emirates, Indonesia, Oman, New Zealand and the European Union, the minister said.

Following Bangladesh's graduation from the least developed country (LDC) category, retaining duty-free and preferential trade benefits in international markets will pose a major challenge, he noted.

Muktadir expressed hope that such agreements would help expand markets for readymade garments and other domestic export products, attract new investment and boost bilateral trade.

Make payer names mandatory in digital payments

MIZANUR RAHMAN

Electronic payments have freed businesses and institutions from the trouble of collecting, carrying and depositing cheques. Yet a basic question can remain unanswered after a transfer reaches an account: who paid this money? The payer's name should be a mandatory field for every electronic transfer and should appear in the recipient's payment record.

The problem occurs in both government and private corporate payments. Some bank statements identify the payer, making reconciliation straightforward. Others include only a generic description or the name of a bank. An organisation receiving many payments must match each credit to a customer and an invoice. Without the payer's identity, a completed transfer can remain unresolved in its accounts.

Consider a statement I recently reviewed. On a single day in June, it showed a series of government electronic funds transfer (EFT) credits in different amounts, each carrying essentially the same description: 'EFT Inflow//MOTIJHEEL/TREASURY S/Government'. The amounts and transaction numbers were visible, but the names of the offices making the payments were not. A private company's transfer creates the same difficulty when its name is missing from the credit record.

The practical consequence is easy to see. An accounts team can confirm that money has arrived but cannot confidently assign it to the correct payer. Staff then have to request payment advice, compare amounts with outstanding bills and contact the bank or the paying offices. Sometimes the match is clear; sometimes several bills have similar amounts. Meanwhile, a payer who has already transferred the money may still appear to owe it. That can strain a relationship, despite neither party being at fault.



Every recipient should be able to see who paid, regardless of whether the money comes from a government office or a private company

The problem becomes even more serious at the end of the financial year, when a large number of unidentified receipts may remain unreconciled. This can lead to an understatement of reported revenue, inaccurate outstanding receivables and significant weaknesses in the year-end audit process. What begins as a missing payer name can ultimately affect the reliability of an organisation's financial statements.

I see the benefit of EFT in my own work. A newspaper may receive payment for a small advertisement from a government institution in a distant district. Previously, collecting a Tk 10,000 cheque could mean sending someone to the office, couriering the cheque to Dhaka and asking another colleague to deposit it. Electronic transfers remove much of that effort. But the gain is partly undone if we must spend hours identifying the receipt afterwards.

The Bangladesh Bank should require the actual paying person, company or government office to be identified in a mandatory payer-name field. The name must be captured when the transfer is initiated, passed through the payment system and displayed by the receiving bank in the statement or credit advice. A field that can be left blank, replaced with "Government" or reduced to the bank's name would defeat the purpose.

A bill or invoice reference would further help recipients match payments, and banks should make transaction numbers easy to trace. But those additions do not replace the essential requirement: every recipient should be able to see who paid. The same rule should apply whether the money comes from a government office or a private company.

Digitisation succeeds when the entire process becomes easier, including the accounting that follows payment. A visible payer name enhances transparency and accountability for both sender and recipient. Making payer identity mandatory is a simple, practical step towards that goal.

The writer is the chief financial officer and head of operations of The Daily Star

SK hynix posts seven-fold surge in operating profit

AFP, *Seoul*

South Korean chip giant SK hynix on Wednesday reported a 632 percent surge in third-quarter operating profit, fuelled by booming demand for AI semiconductors, and unveiled plans to return an additional $45 billion to shareholders.

The company is a specialist supplier of high-bandwidth memory (HBM) chips to US industry behemoth Nvidia, and a pillar of South Korea's tech-led economy.

Operating profit for its July-September period reached 83.33 trillion won ($62.8 billion), about seven times the year-ago level, the company said.

Net profit jumped 215.7 percent on-year to 39.77 trillion won, while sales reached 104.61 trillion won.

The firm said it had posted record revenue and operating profit for six straight quarters since April-June last year.

The company is a specialist supplier of high-bandwidth memory (HBM) chips to US industry behemoth Nvidia

However, the net profit reading fell short of market expectations, with the average analyst estimate at 59.67 trillion won, according to South Korea's Yonhap news agency, citing its own data firm.

"SK hynix analysed that a virtuous cycle has taken hold in which AI-driven productivity gains and new revenue generation in areas such as software development, customer service, and search lead to greater AI adoption," the chipmaker said in a statement.

SK hynix also announced Wednesday an additional plan to return 60 trillion won to shareholders, following the completion of a 40 trillion-won shareholder return programme.

Record profits from booming AI memory demand have fuelled calls for greater shareholder returns, especially since the company's stock sank significantly from its June record high on concerns over US tech firms' AI spending.

Natural gas is losing its grip across key power markets

REUTERS

Natural gas was supposed to be the dominant bridge fuel between legacy generation systems and a clean-powered future. But across key markets in Europe and Asia, power producers appear to be increasingly bypassing the fuel in favour of other options.

Total electricity generation from gas-fired power plants has contracted this year from 2025 in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Turkey, Japan, South Korea and China, according to data from think tank Ember.

Those countries represent some of the key traditional and high-potential gas markets for gas power generation, and yet all simultaneously pared back gas use this year as global supplies and prices were impacted by the war in the Middle East.

Significantly, total electricity generation across those six nations has expanded this year despite lower collective gas-fired output, resulting in natural gas losing share to other generation sources within those key power networks.

For exporters of liquefied natural gas, the risk is that gas remains essential as a marginal fuel but ceases to be a growth engine for power generation. Power systems still need gas-fired plants to bolster reliability, but they appear to need progressively less gas-fired electricity from those facilities as renewable generation, storage and output from other power sources expand. That is a challenging outlook for an industry investing heavily in new export capacity on the assumption that tomorrow's power sector will burn substantially more gas than today's.

The steady erosion of natural gas' share within a wide span of key power sectors underscores the problem for gas market bulls. In the Netherlands, home to Europe's main gas trading hub, the gas share of electricity generation during the first nine months of 2026 was just under 32 percent. That's the lowest reading on record for that period and compares to a nearly 60 percent gas share in the same months in 2020 and nearly 40 percent in 2022.



A gas terminal is seen in the port of Rotterdam, the Netherlands. Total electricity generation from gas-fired power plants has contracted this year from 2025 in the UK, the Netherlands, Turkey, Japan, South Korea and China. PHOTO: REUTERS/FILE

In the United Kingdom, the closure of the country's last remaining coal power plant in late 2024 was expected to trigger a sustained upturn in gas use. Yet gas' share of the utility mix plumbed a new low of 29 percent so far this year, compared to roughly 41 percent in the same months in 2022. And in Turkey, which was long considered a viable growth market for gas due to its fast-growing manufacturing base, gas' share of the generation mix this year has dropped to just under 11 percent.

That compares to an average 32 percent gas share in 2021, which is when Turkey's gas-fired generation total hit a record and spurred optimism among gas exporters that the country would continue to steadily increase its gas needs. Gas has also lost ground across key Asian markets. In Japan, which for years has been one of the top LNG importers, gas use in electricity generation has lost ground to both rising output from renewables and a recovery in output from the country's nuclear reactor fleet.

The gas share of Japan's electricity mix so far this year was 28.4 percent, which was the first reading on record below 30 percent, and compares to an average share of around 35 percent in 2022 and nearly 40 percent in 2019. South Korea's power system also reduced gas' share to a multi-year low of just under 29 percent this year, while in China gas' share of the mix was just 3.07 percent, which again was a record low.

Brent rises to $115.24

REUTERS, *London*

Oil prices rose over 1 percent on Wednesday after an attack on a refinery in Saudi Arabia, the world's top crude exporter, renewed concerns about supply risks because of conflicts in the Middle East.

Brent crude futures rose $1.36, or 1.2 percent, to $115.24 a barrel as of 0858 GMT. US West Texas Intermediate crude gained $1.62, or 1.6 percent, at $101.52.

Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthis said on Tuesday they had hit Saudi Arabia's biggest oil refinery with a missile, intensifying their strikes against the world's second-largest crude producer. Saudi authorities did not immediately confirm the strike on the 550,000 barrel-per-day facility. For now, the market is pricing in a greater likelihood of re-escalation, ING commodity strategists said on Wednesday.

"Oil prices remain elevated as the market waits for greater clarity on President (Donald) Trump's next move toward Iran," said ING strategists. "If we get past the elections without renewed strikes on Iran, that might be enough for the market's risk premium to start eroding," they added, referring to US midterm elections on November 3.