The Daily Star
DHAKA THURSDAY OCTOBER 29, 2026
KARTIK 13, 1433 BS
SUPPLEMENT S3

SHIFTING shelves



Supershops adapt to local tastes and tighter budgets

FROM PAGE S1

"A shop in a district town carries more staples and fewer imported items," he said. "Spending power is different, and so are tastes. We stock more loose-weight rice and lentils there and fewer ready meals."

Large purchasing volumes and cold storage also allow chains to offer frozen and chilled products that traditional shops rarely carry. Some are strengthening their supply links with farmers. Meena Bazar told The Daily Star in an earlier report that it sources vegetables directly from growers, although published accounts do not establish how extensively this practice extends to its district-town outlets.

Franchising offers another route into smaller towns. Local investors provide the premises and capital, while brands supply products, systems and signage. This reduces the chains' financial exposure and gives investors access to established business models. However, questions remain over who bears the losses when an outlet struggles and whether service standards remain consistent.

For shoppers, the advantages are straightforward. Fixed prices eliminate bargaining, stores often stay open late, and some offer delivery. Promotions on oil and detergent can help households manage their budgets, although comparing discounts is not always easy.

Packaged and frozen foods have also become more common. However, it is difficult to determine how much of this shift is driven by supershops and how much by busier working lives, smartphones, delivery apps and greater access to refrigerators.

The drawbacks are equally clear. Loose vegetables, fish and meat can cost less at traditional markets. Organised retail does not guarantee quality either. Air-conditioned stores can sell stale produce, and shoppers have reported finding expired products on shelves.

Tax also affects the price difference. Media reports have highlighted the 5% VAT on supermarket purchases compared with the absence of equivalent retail VAT in open markets. Later reports said VAT relief boosted chain sales, with Shwapno recording a 15% increase in footfall over a month.

Yet traditional shops offer something chains cannot easily replicate: credit. Khadija Begum buys her monthly supply of rice and oil from the shop her family has used for twenty years. She pays at the end of the month, when her husband receives his salary.

"He knows when money's tight," she said. "I couldn't ask a supermarket to wait."

This flexibility matters to households without regular incomes. Supershops suit families with predictable earnings and weekly shopping routines, while daily-wage earners may prefer buying small quantities as money becomes available.

Zakir Hossain, general secretary of the Bangladesh Supermarket Owners' Association, said in an earlier report in The Daily Star that chains struggled in their early years because customers were unfamiliar with the concept. That has changed, although not evenly.

Meanwhile, neighbourhood shops are adapting by adding shelves that let customers browse, accepting mobile payments and stocking packaged products commonly found in supermarkets. Others have changed little and continue to do well.

Back on the main road, Rumana Akter swipes her card, packs her bag and says she will return next Thursday. On Saturday, though, she will still be at the vegetable market, bargaining amiably over the price of bottle gourd.



IMAGE: MAGNIFIC

Bangladesh's retail landscape is evolving as supershops introduce more organised shopping experiences and wider product ranges. However, traditional markets remain competitive by offering lower prices, familiar service and the flexibility many households need.



Making supershops part of everyday shopping

GALIB FARROKH BAKHT

Daily Shopping

As households weigh every purchase, supershops face pressure to keep prices affordable while meeting rising operating costs. In an interview with The Daily Star, Galib Farrokh Bakht, chief operating officer of Daily Shopping, discusses changing shopping habits, expansion beyond major cities and the policies needed to support organised retail.

THE DAILY STAR (TDS): How do you assess the current state of Bangladesh's supershop sector?

GALIB FARROKH BAKHT (GFB): Consumers want quality products, accurate weights, a clean environment and convenient shopping alongside affordable prices. This demand is growing beyond major cities. Organised retail still accounts for a small share of the market, leaving room for growth. We see its future in becoming a dependable place for ordinary families to shop.

TDS: How are inflation and operating costs affecting your business?

GFB: Families are considering more carefully what to buy, how much they need and where they can save. Meanwhile, rent, wages, electricity, transport and storage costs are putting pressure on retailers.

We are increasing direct sourcing and reducing waste. Our priority is customers' total savings on regular shopping, beyond individual discounts. Expansion is also bringing more customers, helping cover costs.

TDS: How has the removal of separately charged VAT affected customer interest and sales?

GFB: It has helped address the perception that buying the same product at a supershop necessarily means paying extra. We see signs of greater interest, but sales also depend on prices, availability, promotions and outlet locations. Affordable prices and consistently good service must turn that interest into regular shopping.

> **Modernisation should deliver affordable, quality products to consumers and fair prices to farmers.**
>
> **Galib Farrokh Bakht**
> Chief Operating Officer
> Daily Shopping

TDS: What government support would help the sector grow?

GFB: We need fair competition and stable policies. Customers should not face additional tax simply because of where they choose to shop. A one-stop service for licences and approvals would reduce costs and delays. Food safety, quality and weight regulations should apply equally to all retailers. Better cold storage, direct sourcing and farmer training in Good Agricultural Practices would help reduce waste.

TDS: How many outlets do you operate, and where could you expand?

GFB: Daily Shopping currently has 150 outlets in Bangladesh. We see opportunities in residential neighbourhoods, district towns, upazila headquarters and communities near industrial areas. Purchasing power, local needs, accessibility and supply arrangements guide expansion. We particularly see potential in densely populated areas with limited access to organised retail. Each outlet must remain viable.

TDS: How can supershops make retail more accountable?

GFB: Clear prices, accurate weights, receipts, expiry checks and complaint handling build trust. Direct producer links help trace products and maintain quality. Supershops can support small businesses, create jobs and encourage digital payments. Greater accountability can help curb market manipulation.

Modernisation should deliver affordable, quality products to consumers and fair prices to farmers.

FOLLOWING THE SUPERSHOP TRAIL



Agora opens — 2001
Rahimafrooz launches Agora as Bangladesh's first modern supershop chain.



ACI enters retail — 2008
ACI Logistics enters with Fresh and Near, the business behind Shwapno.



Agora acquires PQS — 2011
Five PQS stores in Dhaka are set to take the Agora name.



Daily Shopping begins — 2014
Pran launches the chain in January with seven Dhaka outlets.



Delivery gains ground — 2020
Pandemic restrictions accelerate online ordering and home delivery.

2002 Meena Bazar joins
Gemcon Group launches another early name in Bangladesh's organised grocery retail.



2010 Agora goes beyond Dhaka
The chain opens its first store outside the capital, in Chattogram.



2013 Unimart arrives
United Group introduces a larger format with a 40,000-square-foot store.

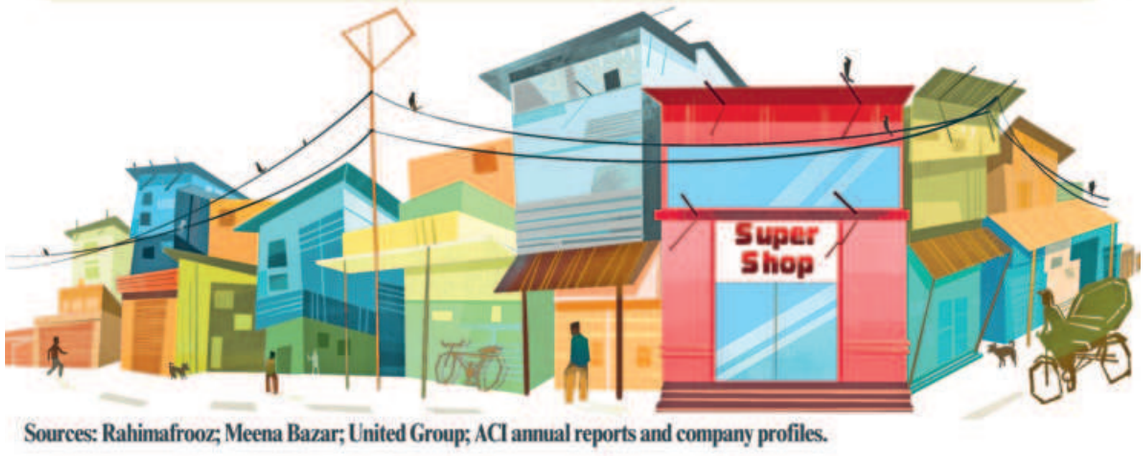


2017-18 Franchising takes hold
Shwapno introduces a franchise model that later drives expansion.



2026 Shwapno crosses 1,000 outlets
The chain reports 1,001 outlets nationwide in August.





Sources: Rahimafrooz; Meena Bazar; United Group; ACI annual reports and company profiles.

INFOGRAPHICS: S. M. TAHMID | ILLUSTRATION: TANVIR MALEK

