Behind Bangladesh's garment boom, workers cut food, healthcare as wages fall short

REUTERS, *Gazipur*

Before dawn each day, garment worker Shilpi Khatun cooks over a wood-fired clay stove because her family cannot afford gas, before heading to a factory in Gazipur, an industrial hub on the outskirts of Dhaka.

The 27-year-old is the sole breadwinner in a household where her husband is unemployed and her parents and in-laws depend on her wages.

Rising prices have left Khatun struggling to afford basic necessities despite five years in the garment industry, a frustration shared by thousands of Bangladesh's garment workers who staged protests last week demanding the minimum monthly wage be raised to 30,000 taka ($242.82) from 12,500 taka.

"Everything costs more now. Rent has doubled, food is more expensive and whatever I earn disappears before the month is over," Khatun said as she gathered leafy greens outside her home to eat with rice for lunch.

WAGE PRESSURE MOUNTS

Last week's unrest, some of it violent, forced hundreds of factories to shut down as workers staged protests and clashed with police, who used tear gas and sound grenades to disperse demonstrators.

The government's wage board agreed on November 4 to implement a revised wage structure from December, with workers set to receive their first pay under the new scale in January, but has yet to determine the size of the increase.



Garment workers enter a factory to begin their shift in Baipail, near Dhaka, on November 5, 2026. PHOTO: REUTERS

Low labour costs have helped make Bangladesh the world's second-largest apparel exporter after China and a preferred manufacturing base for global brands, including H&M, Zara, Gap, Primark and Walmart. The industry generates more than 80 percent of the country's export earnings and employs more than 4 million people.

Manufacturers, however, say a steep wage increase would erode Bangladesh's cost advantage over rivals such as India and Vietnam and further squeeze margins already under pressure from higher energy costs.

Workers also receive a 9 percent annual increment and two festival bonuses in addition to their basic wages, manufacturers say, arguing there is limited room for substantial pay increases.

WORKERS MAKE STARK CHOICES

Workers like Khatun say the wage increase has not kept pace with rising prices, forcing them to make difficult choices over everyday spending.

On the hardest days, Khatun's family survives on puffed rice, she said. Sitting in the small tin-shed room she shares with her husband, she said she had not seen a doctor in three years despite worsening health problems.

Her salary has crept up over five years but not enough to match rising costs. She now earns 13,500 taka ($108), up from 9,000 taka when she started. With overtime, she earns about 16,000 taka, but the money rarely lasts until the next payday, she said.

Bangladesh has faced a prolonged cost-of-living squeeze since 2022, with inflation averaging around 9 percent. Food prices initially drove the surge, but non-food costs have remained high.

"I think twice before buying anything, even food," said Roksana Parveen, a 29-year old sewing operator in a factory in Ashulia on the outskirts of Dhaka.

"I know my daughters should be eating better, but I just can't afford it."

Parveen and her two daughters often live on little more than rice and vegetables, with meat and fish becoming luxuries beyond their reach. To cut costs, one of her daughters dropped out of school.

Gold gains after steep drop

REUTERS

Gold prices climbed on Wednesday, but remained anchored near the $4,000 level after a sharp selloff in the previous session following a hot US inflation print and hawkish policymakers' comments that tilted market expectations towards further and larger rate hikes.

Spot gold rose 0.5 percent to $4,051.31 per ounce by 0916 GMT after dropping as much as 3 percent to $4,013.29 on Tuesday. US gold futures for December delivery gained 0.7 percent to $4,059 per ounce.

"Gold is seeing some slight relief after its post-CPI declines," said Han Tan, chief market analyst at Bybit. "However, it's a tough ask for gold bulls to keep pushing prices higher, given the prospects of more Fed rate hikes in the pipeline."

Dollar rises

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according to Bangladesh Bank (BB) data.

Food imports also increased during the period, with edible oil purchases rising 54 percent and wheat imports climbing 66 percent.

Consequently, the country's trade deficit widened 31 percent year-on-year to $7.48 billion in the first quarter of the current fiscal year, as the fuel import bill more than doubled.

Industry insiders attributed the higher fuel import costs partly to rising global prices amid the Iran war and tensions in the Middle East.

The pressure on the foreign exchange market is also reflected in import financing. Banks opened letters of credit (LCs) worth $7.32 billion in October, while settling import bills of $5.95 billion, according to BB data.

Bangladesh has been grappling with foreign currency shortages and pressure on its exchange rate since 2022, when soaring global commodity prices pushed up import costs and depleted foreign exchange reserves. The taka, which traded at around Tk 85-Tk 86 per dollar in 2021, subsequently underwent several rounds of depreciation.

Recently, the central bank has taken several steps to facilitate imports ahead of Ramadan and prevent shortages of essential commodities.

In a recent directive, BB asked commercial banks to keep cash margins for opening LCs for 10 essential food items at the minimum level, based on their relationships with customers.

The central bank has also allowed commercial imports of these commodities under deferred payment terms of up to 90 days through suppliers' or buyers' credit. The facility is intended to ease the immediate foreign currency payment burden on importers, facilitate supplies, and help contain prices during Ramadan.

Asia takes 70% of trained workers

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Training should be designed around specific occupations and the actual requirements of prospective employers in destination countries," the research manager said.

"Technical competence alone is insufficient for entering many European and other developed-country labour markets. Workers may need to demonstrate proficiency in the destination country's language, communication skills, workplace behaviour, digital literacy and an understanding of occupational safety standards."

Urmi also stressed the need to strengthen the international credibility of Bangladesh's skills assessment and certification systems.

"Even when workers possess relevant practical skills, the absence of recognised qualifications, transparent competency assessment and mutual recognition arrangements can prevent them from accessing formal employment opportunities abroad," she said.

SOME OCCUPATIONS REACH MORE MARKETS

The authority's occupation-wise analysis shows that five occupations have placements across six geographical regions: driving, electrical installation and maintenance, plumbing and pipe fitting, refrigeration and air conditioning, and welding.

Another seven occupations have a presence across five regions, including automotive mechanics, caregiving, computer operation, electronics servicing, food and beverage production and service, machine shop practice, and sewing machine operation.

Several others, including digital marketing, graphic design, housekeeping, IT support, garments, safety and compliance, and sales and customer service, have placements across four regions.

The geographical spread of these occupations suggests scope for Bangladesh to diversify overseas employment beyond its traditional destinations. Caregiving and automotive mechanics, in particular, have a presence across five regions, while digital marketing, IT support, graphic design, and web design and development indicate opportunities beyond traditional manual and technical jobs.

Solar photovoltaic technicians have placements in Asia, Europe and Australia and Oceania, reflecting potential opportunities in markets expanding renewable energy installations.

However, several occupations, including accounting, carpentry, fashion design and product development, knit sewing machine operation, mixing helper, and tourism or tour guiding, remain confined to a single region in the reported data.

TRAINER SHORTAGE LIMITS CAPACITY

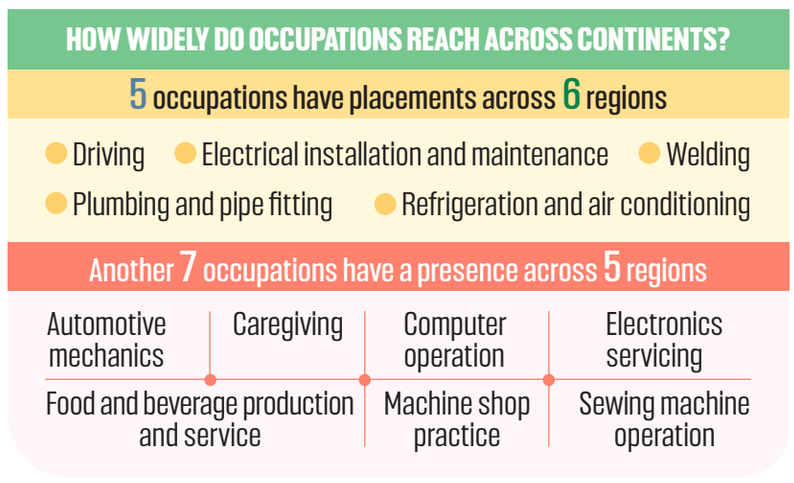
NSDA Executive Chairman Nazneen Kawshar Chowdhury said about 43 percent of training providers were underutilised, partly because of a shortage of qualified trainers.

"Completion-based training does not necessarily produce skilled workers," she said.

"We must focus on competency-based training."

The NSDA currently has nearly 2,700 trainers and aims to build a pool of 10,000 trainers by 2030.

Since launching its certification in 2022, nearly 6.76 lakh people have undergone regular or Recognition of Prior Learning assessments, of whom 4.90 lakh were found competent.



StanChart

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the necessary scale and the most differentiated proposition for our cross-border and affluent clients," said Bitopi Das Chowdhury, country head of corporate affairs and brand and marketing at StanChart.

The foreign bank said it was building the leading super-connector institution for clients operating across borders and remained committed to furthering its Corporate and Investment Banking (CIB) business in Bangladesh.

"We are seeing considerable interest and expect a competitive process to be followed," it said, "For confidentiality purposes, we are unable to comment on who we are in talks with."

StanChart said it had earlier announced that the process would take approximately 18-24 months to complete. "As such, we are very early in any process and will update as and when we have more information."

In a statement in early October, the bank announced the sale of its retail banking business to sharpen its focus on corporate and investment banking.

Govt expects to finalise IMF talks

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On the revenue front, Khosru said income tax and customs collections had each grown by more than 14 percent, while VAT revenue was expanding at a slower pace.

He attributed the comparatively weak VAT growth partly to the recent introduction of a quarterly system, saying the corresponding figures had yet to be reflected in collection data.

He expected VAT receipts to improve in the coming quarters, helping the government meet its annual revenue target.

Asked about revenue shortfalls amid rising government expenditure, the minister said the government was assessing spending decisions based on their economic returns and potential to generate employment.

"Every taka of taxpayers' money that we spend must generate value. It must have a return on investment and contribute to employment creation," he said.

He said expenditure would be managed in line with revenue and that the government was weighing the economic benefits of every spending decision.

"The economy is moving in the right direction. We are on the right course," he said.

On the proposed bifurcation of the NBR, Khosru said the government had already settled the decision and would provide it with a legal basis.

"Bifurcation is a settled matter. It can easily be given a legal shape," he said.

Asked whether the proposal would be placed before parliament, he said, "Whatever is necessary will be done."

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Local Government Engineering Department
Office of the Executive Engineer
Jhalakathi.
www.lged.gov.bd

Memo: 46.02.4200.000.07.014.26-2057 Date: 10/11/2026

Tender Notice No- 14/2026-27 (LTM: 01-05)

e-Tender is hereby invited in the National e-GP system portal (http://www.eprocure.gov.bd) for the procurement of following work.

Sl. No.	Tender ID	Name of the work with Package No	Method of Procurement	Date of Publication	Last Date of Selling	Last Date of Receiving Tender
01	1354594	**LGED/GOBM/JLK/26-27/RW-19** Periodic Maintenance of Kaikhali GC-Amua GC via Goserhat Road from Ch 3000m - Ch 5500m [Road ID 542432005] [KATHALIA]	LTM	12-Nov-2026	29-Nov-2026 12:00	30-Nov-2026 12:00
02	1354593	**LGED/GOBM/JLK/26-27/RW-21** Rehabilitation of Mollar Hat RHD - Sreemontokathi-N-Pingri via Balarjore Hat GC from Ch 8277m - Ch 11287m [Road ID 542842004] [RAJAPUR]	LTM	12-Nov-2026	29-Nov-2026 12:00	30-Nov-2026 12:00
03	1354576	**LGED/GOBM/JLK/26-27/RW-12** Rehabilitation of Goyalkati - Kandopasa from Ch 00m - Ch 915m [Road ID 542735099] [NALCHITY]	LTM	12-Nov-2026	29-Nov-2026 12:00	30-Nov-2026 12:00
04	1354575	**LGED/GOBM/JLK/26-27/RW-14** Rehabilitation of Shirjughat(St. from UZR2005)-Amrajuri Ferryghat Road from Ch 00m - Ch 1390m [Road ID 542404178] [JHALOKATHI-S]	LTM	12-Nov-2026	29-Nov-2026 12:00	30-Nov-2026 12:00
05	1354570	**LGED/GOBM/JLK/26-27/CW-03** Rehabilitation of 01 No. Single Vent 2.50mx2.50m RCC Box Culvert on Nizamia high School- North Palot Launch Ghat via Baroia high school Road at Ch.920.00m [Road ID 542844139] [RAJAPUR]	LTM	12-Nov-2026	29-Nov-2026 12:00	30-Nov-2026 12:00

e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP system portal (http://eprocure.gov.bd) is required. The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from the National e-GP System portal have to be deposited online through any registered bank's branches. Details, information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System portal and from e-GP Help Desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

(QUAZI MAHMUDULLAH)
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GD-2741

CIVIL AVIATION AUTHORITY OF BANGLADESH
Office of the Director
Shah Amanat International Airport, Chattogram.

e-Tender Notice (OTM)

S/N	Tender ID	Reference No.	Name of Works	Tender Closing Date & Time	Remarks
1.	1363712	30.31.0000.000.211.32.0347.22.669	Supply of Pallet for Cargo Operation at SAIA, CTG.	22-Nov-2026 12:30:00	

This is an online tender, where only e-Tenders will be accepted in e-GP portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, please resister on e-GP system portal. (http://www.eprocure.gov.bd)

স্মারক নং-৩০.৩১.০০০০.০৫১.১১.০০১.২৬/৫৯৮
তারিখ: ১১/১১/২০২৬ খ্রি.

Group Captain Md. Nur Hossain
Director
Shah Amanat International Airport, Chattogram.

GD-3740

RMG exports

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Earlier, Bangladesh's RMG exports to the EU had fallen 16.43 percent year-on-year to €8.64 billion in January-June 2026, according to Eurostat, the bloc's statistical office.

During the six-month period, export volumes fell 8.22 percent year-on-year, while prices declined 8.94 percent.

Spain had overtaken Germany as Bangladesh's largest EU market for RMG in July-September of FY2026-27, with exports rising nearly 14 percent year-on-year to $1.14 billion. Exports to Germany stood at $1.12 billion, registering a marginal decline of 0.15 percent.