Business

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starbusiness@thedailystar.net



Food safety testing to go mobile

Authority proposes 72 lab vans at Tk 390cr as experts urge it to make full use of existing district labs alongside them



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

A mobile food-testing van stands outside the Bangladesh Food Safety Authority office in Shahbagh, Dhaka, as the authority plans to spend Tk 390 crore on 72 vans despite staff and equipment shortages at existing district labs. The photo was taken recently.

SUKANTA HALDER

The Bangladesh Food Safety Authority (BFSA) wants to take food testing onto the road, with 72 mobile mini laboratories that would check daily essentials such as edible oil, milk, ghee, turmeric and chilli powder on the spot.

The authority wants to buy the vans for all districts and metropolitan cities as part of a tougher drive against food adulteration.

Fitted with testing kits, the customised vans would carry out instant checks and help raise public awareness, officials said. They would supplement the existing mini labs in every district across the country.

The mobile mini laboratory vans have been running in eight divisional cities for two years, and the authority is now convinced the model can go nationwide.

The 72 vans would cost about Tk 390 crore. Those will be purchased with BFSA funds under the second phase of the BFSA Capacity Enhancement Project, according to a proposal by the authority to the planning ministry.

As per the proposal, the Food Safety Authority wants to complete the project by June 2030.

Food Minister Afroza Khanam said the vans are meant for testing food samples instantly during monitoring drives.

"With its current capacity, it is quite challenging for the authority to identify adulteration and contamination in various foods and ensure food safety in faraway parts of the country," she told The Daily Star.

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Decade of taka depreciation key driver of inflation

Says BB governor

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The depreciation of the local currency taka over the past decade is a major driver of inflation, Bangladesh Bank Governor Md Mostaqur Rahman said, as he urged commercial banks to cut the margins they add when selling dollars to importers.

Speaking at the 5th Bangladesh Economic Conference in Dhaka yesterday, he said the taka has lost about 60 percent of its value in 10 years, or roughly 6 percent a year.

Business daily Bonik Barta organised the conference amid the Middle East conflict, energy volatility and global supply chain disruptions to discuss strategies for the country's macroeconomic stability, investment expansion, and energy security.

At the programme, the central bank governor said Bangladesh is import-dependent, and even local production relies on imported inputs, so depreciation fed through to prices.

Bangladesh Bank (BB) data show the average rate against the US dollar rose from Tk 78.26 in fiscal year 2015-16 to Tk 122.30 in fiscal year 2025-26, an increase of about 56 percent.

The governor said all key indicators, including reserves and private sector credit growth, were negative when he took charge early this year.

"Banking sector troubles, including money being siphoned off, added to the burden," he said.

Mostaqur said the banking sector would need Tk 60,000 crore a year for the next five to eight years to recover from massive "financial looting and structural damage".

According to the governor, the current generation is leaving the next a heavy legacy.

The governor said private sector credit growth has slowed to almost single digits, largely because of high interest rates and a shortage of readymade lending products.

"The second phase of the stimulus package is aimed at bringing rates down further," he said, adding that a cut in the policy rate would help.

Mostaqur said the central bank has cut rates by half a percentage point and hopes to ease further. But high inflation limits room for rate cuts.

He said lending has also become concentrated in a few corporate borrowers over the past decade, with corporate loans making up 70-80 percent of the total.

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Risky banks need loan reviews, recovery plans

Knowledge Hub Institute says

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh Bank (BB) should independently review loans at high-risk banks, step up cash recovery from defaulted borrowers and prepare separate plans to restore or resolve troubled banks based on their financial condition, said the Knowledge Hub Institute (KHI).

In its quarterly banking sector review, the private think tank also called for greater transparency in the use of public funds to support struggling banks, regular updates on deposit repayments and closer monitoring of government-backed credit programmes.

The institute set December 2026 and March 2027 as key deadlines for implementing the proposed measures, identifying loan loss verification, uninterrupted payments and productive use of funds as priorities for restoring confidence in the banking sector.

The private think tank called for greater transparency in the use of public funds to support struggling banks

The review was presented at a press briefing at the institute's office in Dhaka yesterday.

Khondaker Golam Moazzem, president of KHI, said independent loan assessments are essential to establish the actual losses at troubled banks and determine their capital needs.

Banks should also consider selling assets transparently where appropriate. Any transfer of distressed assets must be backed by independent valuation and checks on the buyer's ownership, he added.

Presenting the report, Shah Md Ahsan Habib, component lead of the institute, said BB should complete independent loan reviews at high-risk banks by December and require them to submit monthly reports on cash recovery.

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SPOTLIGHT

Women in small business got just 7.5% of loans in Q4 2025: BB

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh received just 7.5 percent of total Cottage, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise (CMSME) loans disbursed in the final quarter of 2025, despite accounting for more than a third of total enterprise borrowers, according to a Bangladesh Bank (BB) report.

Banks and finance companies disbursed a total of Tk 70,171 crore in CMSME loans during the quarter ended December 2025.

Of the total, women-owned enterprises received Tk 5,284 crore, while male-owned firms received Tk 64,890 crore, according to the Financial Inclusion Report 2025, published by the central bank this week.

The report shows that just over 1,61,200 women-owned enterprises received formal CMSME loans during the period, accounting for 37.6 percent of total enterprise borrowers.

The BB said women's share of total bank loan accounts fell to 18.6 percent in the fourth quarter of 2025 from 20 percent a year earlier, as male borrowers captured a larger share of overall credit expansion.

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Sourcing expo opens today with more exhibitors, no export target

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The second Global Sourcing Expo Dhaka begins today with more exhibitors, wider product coverage and buyers from several countries, but no export target has been set for the three-day event.

Organised by the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) and the Ministry of Commerce, the expo will run till November 17 at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Exhibition Centre in Purbachal.

It brings together 161 organisations from 12 sectors, up from 125 organisations representing eight sectors last year, EPB officials said yesterday at a press briefing in Dhaka.

Mohammad Hasan Arif, vice chairman and chief executive of EPB, said the bureau expects better results this year, citing the higher number of exhibitors, broader sectoral participation and greater interest from foreign buyers.

Asked about last year's results and this year's target, he could not immediately provide the figures.

As an example of the event's potential, Hasan cited a $10 million pharmaceutical export agreement with an Afghan buyer at last year's expo.

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