

Where Is The Gap Between BNP And Interim Govt ?

Fortnightly Magazine

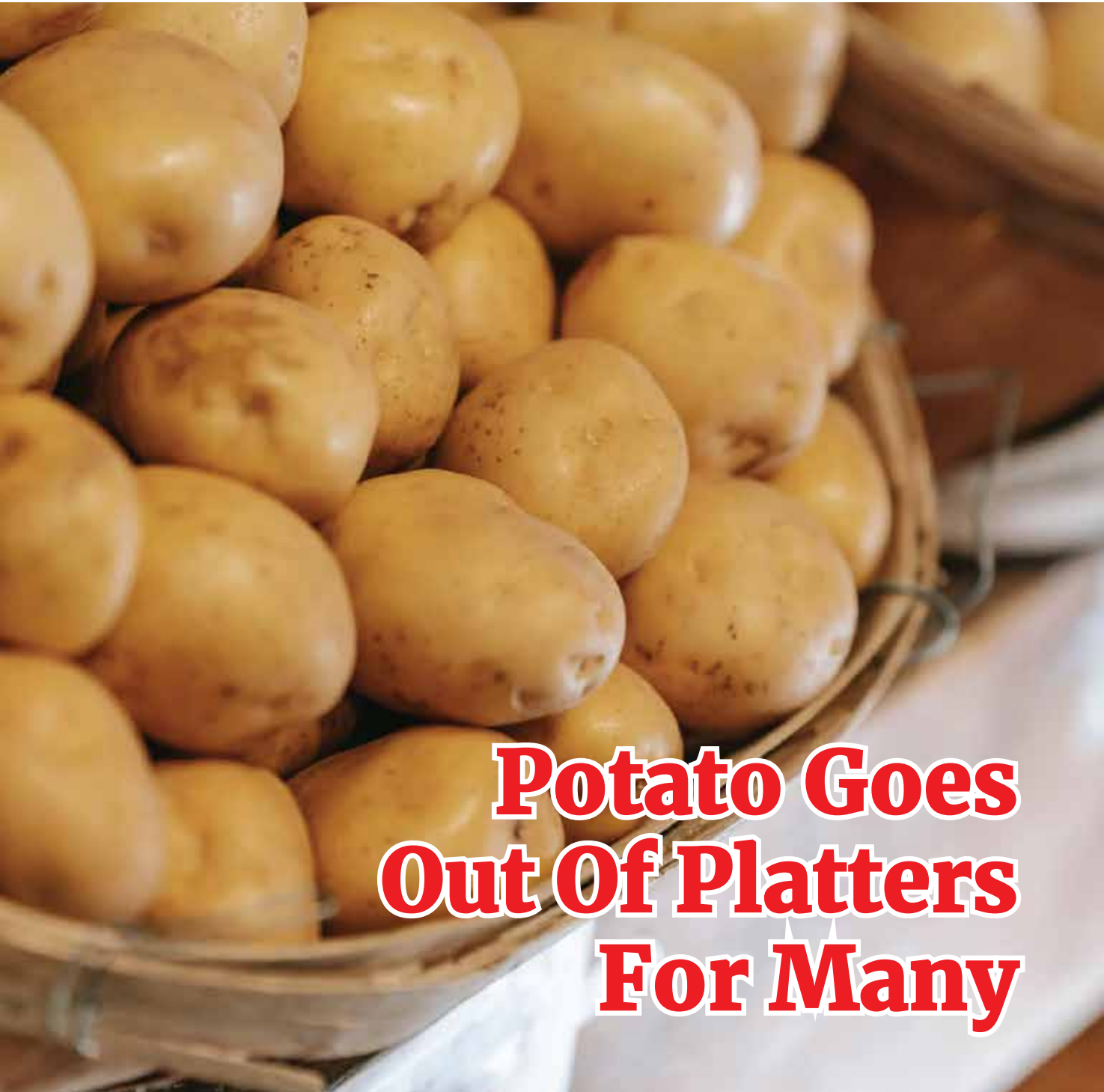
Business Outlook

www.businessoutlookbd.com

13th Year of Publication

01 December 2024

Price: Tk 30



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From the Editor

Devise Proper Plan To Rein In Potato Market

Potatoes are one of the most favourite items in the plates of the poor because of its affordable price with availability in the market. But now the item has lost both the affordability and availability and instead become a food for the rich. It cannot be imagined that low-income people like rickshaw-pullers or garment workers can buy one kg of potato at Tk 75. There might be many more reasons like recent floods, rains and higher price of agricultural inputs behind such a situation. But to many market observers, the main reason is market manipulation and lack of market monitoring. When it is found by an official of the Directorate of National Consumer Rights Protection during their drive against the unscrupulous traders that they were selling the product at a much higher rate than the logical one, it is easy to believe how the manipulators are playing their game in the market. He said they slapped a Tk 2 lakh fine on three traders for selling potatoes at higher rates than usual. The officials said the price of local and imported potatoes should not exceed Tk 45, but the traders were selling the item at Tk 65 per kg. However, many believe that realising fines does not give any tangible outcome to check the price manipulation. Instead, the business establishments should be closed down for some specific period. Recouping the amount of fine is a matter of time for the errant traders, they said.

But at the same time, there must be a proper plan and efficient management to meet the demand and supply gap to keep the market stable. Making forecasts about the future scenario of demand and supply is a must and timely taking measures to fill the gap either by import or by local production is essential. Many experts believe that market vigilance and monitoring would have not been required had the government settled the demand and supply management properly. Not only in the case of potatoes, but the mismatch in demand and supply of many other items, including eggs, rice, wheat, sugar and edible oil, has also created scopes for the traders to manipulate the prices and market as well. It has been reported that the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics carried out the wishes of the previous AL regime to generate data that according to economists caused the market destabilisation. The fixation of such a destabilised market quickly is a difficult task. We will suggest the government should not walk the flawed path, but do a proper plan with efficient management and intensify market monitoring to tackle the situation. ■



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Published by the Editor

From

Zahan Plaza (3rd floor), 42/1-Ka, Segun Baghicha, Dhaka-1000.

Printed from

Shariatpur Printing Press, 234 Fakirapul, Dhaka-1000.

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Issue-22, 01 - 15 December 2024

Released on 30 November 2024



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Karachi-Ctg Shipping Route To Speed Up Trade

Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) Chairman Rear Admiral SM Moniruzzaman has said that the new shipping route directly linking Karachi and Chattogram has opened new horizons for Bangladesh's foreign trade. He was addressing a press conference organised at the Shaheed Munshi Fazlur Rahman Auditorium on November 19. Mentioning how the two countries previously used transshipment ports in Colombo and Singapore, Moniruzzaman said the direct route would save both time and money. Container vessel MV Yang Xiang Fa Zhan, carrying 328 import containers comprising 264 from Karachi and 64 from Dubai's Jebel Ali port, arrived at Chattogram port on November 11. The vessel left for Indonesia the following day. It was the first direct vessel from Karachi to Chattogram that also connected the UAE, Indonesia, Malaysia and India. "The



vessel arrived underload due to less demand of imports. However, the shipping liner will continue to operate it if adequate import containers are available," Moniruzzaman added. He also said that the port saw 10.22 percent year-on-year growth in container handling in the last three months since he joined office. CPA board members and senior port officials attended the briefing. ■

NBR Reduces VAT On Import Of Edible Oil

The National Board of Revenue (NBR) has reduced the VAT on the import of edible oil to 5% from the existing 10%. The revenue board also issued a circular in this regard on November 19 in a bid to ensure a smooth supply of edible oil in the market. Earlier, the NBR issued circulars giving duty waivers on the import of rice, potatoes, sugar, onion, egg, and edible oil to boost the supply of those essential commodities in the market. On 17 October, the NBR waived 15% VAT on the local production level and 5% VAT on the local trade level in the supply of refined and unrefined soybean and palm oil. With the latest waiver, there remains only 5% VAT at the import stage of edible oil. The NBR also said that the facility would remain intact till 15 December. ■



BB Announces 10% Incentive For Exporting Agro-Processed Products



The Bangladesh Bank (BB) has introduced a 10% cash incentive for the export of agricultural and agro-processed products. This incentive will apply specifically to juices and drinks made from locally produced fruit pulp, allowing exporters in this sector to benefit from the support. The Foreign Exchange and Policy Department of BB issued a notification on November 19, outlining new guidelines for cash assistance in the export of agricultural (vegetables/fruits) and processed (agro-processing) agricultural products. According to the notification, exporters will now receive cash assistance for exporting juices and drinks made using locally sourced fruit pulp. ■

AL Govt Destroys Business, Energy Sectors

Commerce Sheikh Bashir Uddin has blamed the recently ousted Awami League government for destroying the country's business and energy sectors. "Anarchy in business and energy sectors reached its peak while there was no dignity of the businessmen during Awami League's regime," he made the allegation while addressing a seminar held at a hotel in Gulshan area of Dhaka on November 23. The commerce minister said the incumbent government has already restored a trade and commerce-friendly atmosphere so the businessmen should come forward to boost the country's overall economy. Citing instances of harassment by the previous government, he said, "I cannot calculate how much money I have given to the influential people of the Awami League government to do business." "Now no one has to pay money. Opportunity comes in our lives. We should take the opportunity for the betterment of the country," said Bashir Uddin, also managing director of Akij-Bashir Group, an industrial conglomerate in Bangladesh. ■



Chinese Embassy In Bangladesh Hosts Chinese Culture Night Event



The Chinese Embassy in Bangladesh on November 22 held the grand "Chinese Culture Night" special cultural event in Dhaka. The event was attended by nearly 300 distinguished guests, creating a vibrant and festive atmosphere. Among the notable attendees were Chinese Ambassador Yao Wen, Foreign Advisor to the Bangladeshi Interim Government Md Touhid Hossain, Dhaka University Vice-Chancellor Prof Dr Niaz Ahmed Khan, North South University Vice-Chancellor Prof Dr Abdul Hannan Chowdhury, Shanto-Mariam University of Creative Technology Vice-Chancellor Prof Dr Shah E Alam, Daffodil Family Group CEO Prof Dr Mohammad Nuruz Zaman, Director General of the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy Syed Jamil Ahmed, Bangladesh-China Cultural, Economic, and Mass Communication Center President Air Vice Marshal Altaf Hossain Chowdhury, Bangladesh Nationalist Party Vice-Chairman Abdul Awal Mintoo, Association of Bangladesh China Alumni President Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad, and COSMOS Group Founder and Managing Director Enayetullah Khan. ■

Duties On Dates Slashed Ahead Of Ramadan

The government has reduced the import duty on dates to 15% from 25%, and cancelled all the advance taxes, according to a National Board of Revenue (NBR) order issued on November 21. Since 2022, over 60% duties were imposed on date imports for curtailing overseas buying, significantly increasing prices during Ramadan. The duty reduction would cut the tax burden by 20% for importers, three months ahead of the month of Ramadan. The next Ramadan is expected to begin at the end of February or at the beginning of March. The new duty cut scheme would remain effective until the end of March, allowing consumers to purchase at reduced rates throughout the holy month of fasting. The earlier than expected duty cut is aimed at pre-empting any unwarranted price hikes and for allowing the impact to trickle down to the consumer



market before Ramadan arrives. Notably, Bangladeshi traders cater to the domestic annual demand of 1.2 lakh tonnes dates mostly through imports from Middle East and North African countries as well as Pakistan. ■



Where Is The Gap Between BNP And Interim Govt ?

SMS Hasan

There is the problem actually lying between the main political party BNP and the Prof Yunus-led interim government, and also between another major party Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami and the government? Both the BNP, Jamaat and the interim government are seeking to implement reforms in different sectors and move towards the election to form a democratic government. But somehow there is a gap between them. What is that gap? Is anyone or any party working to reduce or bridge that gap? Is it a hard job to bridge the gap? Is the fallen fascist Awami League trying to come back cashing in on that gap? Who are helping them to be rehabilitated in politics again? These are the questions now being discussed in the political circle. Many believe that the recent chaotic situation – especially the agitation programme by a section of Hindu minorities and

clashes between the students of three colleges in the old part of the city and Jatrabari area, siege by auto-rickshaw drivers and finally the efforts by a low-profile political party to gather at Shahbagh – are suggesting that there is a link between all these incidents. Sensing this indication, the leaders of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement, which spearheaded the mass uprising leading to the fall of the Sheikh Hasina regime, sat with all student organisations and came up with a call to intensify the unity against fascism and build united resistance against any move to rehabilitate the fallen Awami League. The political analysts observed that the BNP has been pushing up its agenda for an early election alongside its reform initiative. Sometimes its criticism of different steps of the interim government gives a message to the masses that it is not happy with the

government. On the other hand, the BNP's stance against any move by the interim government to ban Awami League from politics exposed the differences between them. The BNP has been demanding the interim government take more steps to remove all pro-Awami League bureaucrats from the administration. But the inactiveness of the government in this regard frustrates the BNP. The previous Awami League government filed more than one lakh cases against the BNP leaders and activists across the country to harass them politically. The BNP has been demanding the interim government's quick and intensified steps to cancel these false cases. But despite the interim government's different moves, the progress in this regard is very poor. In particular, the withdrawal or disposal of the corruption cases filed by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) against the BNP leaders

during the Awami League regime is not progressing fast. This actually creates a kind of suspicion in the BNP against the motives and policies of the interim government. So, a kind of discomfort is prevailing in the BNP against some of the advisers of the interim government. Some leaders of the BNP feel that some of the operatives of the interim government might have a different agenda against the BNP so that it could not come to power. So, it might be a reason for the BNP to oppose any move to ban the Awami League. The BNP believes if there is an election, it may resolve many of the issues. On the other hand, the

government, at least some reforms are implemented in the electoral process. But in such political tension and differences between the BNP and the interim government, the Awami League is not sitting idle although most of its top leaders are either in hiding or fled the country after the fall of the Sheikh Hasina regime. Sheikh Hasina herself is maintaining a relationship with its grassroots-level leaders and giving directives to get reorganised. Many analysts find a relationship between the fallen regime and the current unrest. Many alleged that a huge amount of money is being invested from abroad to create such an unrest

hours-long violence, according to hospital sources. The injured took treatment at nearby hospitals. In a statement, Dhaka Metropolitan Police's Deputy Commissioner of Media and Public Relations Muhammad Talebur Rahman said almost 25 people were injured, and refuted claims on social media that two people died in the clash. The DMP requested all to refrain from spreading this sort of misinformation. Several hundred students from Government Shaheed Suhrawardy College and Kabi Nazrul Government College launched an attack on the students of Dr Mahbubur Rahman Mollah College.



Dhaka's Jatrabari turned into a battlefield as students of three colleges in Dhaka city engaged in a violent clash

They vandalised the college building and looted valuables from the institution. This was followed by repeated rounds of chase and counter-chase between the two sides, triggering a clash. After Suhrawardy College and Kabi Nazrul College students left the spot around 1:20pm, members of the army and police went to the scene at about 2:00pm. Ashraf Sameer, managing director of Mollah College, said, "Thousands of so-called students attacked our students and teachers when classes were going on. More than 100 teachers and students were injured in the attack and are receiving treatment at various hospitals nearby." "We strongly condemn the attack and demand a proper investigation. We demand proper justice for those who carried out the attack identifying them as students," he said.

Saleh Uddin, DMP deputy commissioner of the Wari division vowed to bring the perpetrators to book within 24 hours. Six platoons of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) were deployed in the Jatrabari area to prevent further escalations. The attack came a day after several thousand students from more than a dozen colleges, including Mollah College, attacked Kabi Nazrul College and Suhrawardy College in Old Dhaka. During the clash,

Jamaat has a different plan about the election. Its leaders believe that if the election is held after some reforms, it will get some political benefits from the future situation. So, it wants reforms first and then elections. However, in the face of pressure from the BNP, the interim government appointed the chief election commissioner and other commissioners in its path to hold an election. Interim government chief Dr Yunus said the election journey began with the appointment of the election commission. However, political analysts believe still a long way to go to hold a credible and fair election to find a democratic

situation across the country to destabilise the political situation. Now, it is time to see how the political players, especially BNP and Jamaat and the interim government tackle the situation and mitigate their gaps on different issues.

Around 100 Injured In Clash Between Students In Jatrabari

Dhaka's Jatrabari turned into a battlefield on November 25 as students of Government Shaheed Suhrawardy College, Kabi Nazrul Government College and Dr Mahbubur Rahman Mollah College engaged in a violent clash. Around 100 people were injured in the

students beat up rivals and hurled brick chunks at each other. Earlier on November 18, Mollah College student Avijit died in Dhaka National Medical College Hospital due to alleged negligence. Following Avijit's death, students demonstrated against the hospital authorities on the hospital premises. As the protests were ongoing, some students from Suhrawardy and Kabi Nazrul colleges attacked the demonstrators from Mollah College on November 21.

Following the attack, several thousand students, including from Mollah College, Dhaka College, City College and Notre Dame College, on November 24 gathered in front of the hospital again, protesting the death of Avijit and the subsequent attack on Mollah College students. The gathering stretched to Kabi Nazrul College. At one stage, the protesting students tried to break into the college but failed to do so. The protesters then attacked Suhrawardy College after a small group of students of the college tried to chase the demonstrators away from outside Kabi Nazrul College around 1:00pm. Panic spread inside Suhrawardy College as honours first-year exams for the seven colleges affiliated with Dhaka University were ongoing there.

The protesters on the previous day on November 24 vandalised three motorcycles, a car, a microbus, and an ambulance parked on the Suhrawardy College campus.

BNP Has No Discord With Interim Govt Over Reforms

Acting BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman on November 25 said those who are making evil efforts to mislead the people by raising the question of whether election is needed first or reform have different purposes. "BNP has no discord with the interim government over reforms. Those who are making ill efforts to mislead the people by raising the question of whether

election is needed first or reform have different purposes," he said. Tarique Rahman was addressing virtually the annual general meeting of the Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ) held at the Jatiya Press Club here with DUJ President DUJ President Md Shahidul Islam.

The acting BNP chairman said the formation of the Election Commission is an important step towards establishing an elected parliament and government. "The interim government has already reconstituted the Election Commission. We believe this is a significant step towards forming an elected parliament and government, with repre-



BNP Acting Chairman Tarique Rahman said that reconstituting the Election Commission is a significant step towards forming an elected government

sentatives chosen through the people's votes," he said. Tarique said it is a kind of reality that the recent mass uprising did not take place just for an election.

"On the other hand, another harsh reality is that the fugitive dictator managed to establish fascism in the country by repeatedly forming governments without elections, rendering the people politically powerless. So, the election is certainly a key issue in establishing people's rights in democratic political practice," he observed. He also said the election is necessary to empower the people and restore their owner-

ship of the country. Tarique said that the state system should be structured in such a way that all public representatives, from union councils to parliament, are elected directly by the people in order to prevent the rise of fascism.

He said it is essential to ensure voting rights for all citizens without any discrimination to build a Bangladesh free from discrepancy.

Staying Alert To Plots

Tarique urged everyone, including journalists, to stay vigilant, warning that fascist forces and their supporters are conspiring against pro-Bangladesh and democratic forces,

attempting to create division and raise their heads once again. "But I strongly believe that if we all remain alert, there will be no room for misunderstandings in the forces on the side of Bangladesh."

He alleged that various conspiracies, both domestic and foreign, have begun to hinder the nation's ongoing journey towards establishing democracy. "The ousted dictator and his cronies are attempting to regain power through various tactics." The BNP leader also mentioned that many people sacrificed their lives and endured injuries during the July-August mass

uprising to bring down Sheikh Hasina's fascist regime. He alleged that various conspiracies have begun from inside and outside the country to obstruct the nation's ongoing journey towards establishing democracy. "The ousted dictator and its henchmen have started trying to rise again with various tactics." The BNP leader said many people sacrificed their lives and

ensuring people's empowerment by electing public representatives at all levels of government through direct voting in a credible election. "If this is ensured, no one will consider usurping power and becoming a fascist without the people's mandate," he stated. The BNP leader also said if the people are granted their right to vote, they will have the power to eliminate fascist

escape of the fugitive autocrat, along with his illegitimate ministers, MPs, intellectuals, judges, the Khatib of Baitul Mukarram, the president and general secretary of the Jatiya Press Club, and certain journalists, has once again demonstrated that it is not illegal state power, but ultimately the verdict of the people that prevails," Tarique remarked.

Implement Necessary Reforms To Ensure A Credible Election In The Country: Jamaat

Speaking at the programme, Jamaat-e-Islami Secretary General Mia Golam Parwar stated that the Awami League had not only destroyed the country's institutions through politicisation but had also stifled media independence in its quest to establish a fascist regime. He said the primary responsibility of the interim government is to ensure the establishment of a democratic government through free and fair elections.

Parwar observed that many of the current government's decisions and actions are out of step with the desires of the public. The Jamaat leader called upon the government to implement the necessary reforms to ensure a credible election in the country. He opposed the formation of the Election Commission under a law enacted by the Awami League that he argued ran counter to the hopes and aspirations of the people. Parwar urged political parties to unite in their efforts to oust the fascist Awami League through the election. "We, the democratic forces, can develop a strategy to achieve this," he said.

He stated that the Awami League is not a democratic party and, as such, has no right to practice democracy. BNP Standing Committee member Dr AZM Zahid Hossain, Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi, Joint Secretary General Shaheeduddin Chowdhury Anee, Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami Dhaka South City unit Ameer Nurul Islam



Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman addresses a meeting to exchange views with newsmen in Dhaka

sustained injuries during the July-August mass uprising to bring down Sheikh Hasina's fascist regime. "It is the responsibility of those of us who are still alive to repay the blood debt of the martyrs by establishing a democratic, just and discrimination-free Bangladesh. At the same time, it is our duty to take all necessary steps to ensure that the fugitive autocrat and his associates are never rehabilitated in politics," he said.

The BNP leader said proper legal and political action is essential to prevent the rehabilitation of fugitive mafias and their associates.

"On one hand, they must be brought to justice. On the other hand, we must create a situation where the people will reject them politically," he stated.

People's Empowerment

Tarique stressed the importance of

forces. "That is why the BNP demands that elections be held promptly by completing necessary reforms. He said political empowerment of the people is vital to make murderers, robbers, mafias, dictators, and other political evils irrelevant in Bangladesh's politics. Tarique also emphasised that free, fair, and impartial elections, conducted within a reasonable timeframe, are crucial alongside the reform process.

People's Verdict Prevails

The BNP acting chairman said the fleeing of the deposed Awami League regime and its cohorts has proven that it is not unlawful state power, but the people's verdict, that ultimately sustains. He said over the past one and a half decades, the people of Bangladesh have learned through bitter experience the consequences of turning dissent or differing opinions into animosity. "The

Bulbul, among others, spoke at the programme.

Ctg Court Area Turns Violent Over Denial Of Ex-ISKCON Leader's Bail; Lawyer Killed

A lawyer was hacked to death amid clashes between police and Hindu community people on a Chattogram court premises on November 26 after the court rejected bail to former ISKCON leader Chinmoy Krishna Das in a sedition case. Kotwali police station officer-in-charge Fazlul Qader said advocate Saiful Islam Alif was declared dead when he was taken to Chittagong Medical College Hospital around 3pm. Witnesses said unidentified people took him to nearby Jangal Cinema Lane on the ground floor of the court, beat him up and then hacked him to death.

The unrest began when thousands of his followers gathered on the court premises and obstructed the prison van carrying him, demanding his immediate release around 12 pm. After nearly three hours of deadlock, police lobbed teargas shells, fired sound grenades and charged batons to disperse the protesters, said witnesses. Chinmoy, also a spokesperson for the Bangladesh Sanatan Jagaran Mancha, was produced before the Chattogram Sixth Metropolitan Magistrate's Court earlier in the day. The court sent Chinmoy to jail and fixed Wednesday morning for his bail hearing again.

Witnesses said hundreds of people gathered outside the court at noon to prevent the prison van from leaving. Chinmoy Krishna was arrested in the Dhaka airport area on Monday evening by the Detective Branch (DB) police in connection with a sedition case filed at Kotwali Police Station in Chattogram.

The case was filed by local BNP leader Firoz Khan who was later expelled from the party.

Battery-Run Rickshaw Drivers Clash With Police Over Ban On

Major Roads

Drivers of battery-operated rickshaws took to the streets in Dayaganj, Mirpur, Agargaon and Jatrabari in the capital on November 20 to protest against the High Court's decision to ban the vehicles from the Dhaka metropolitan area.

At one point during the protest, clashes broke out between the

drivers arrested at the scene have been taken into police custody, the officer said.

Md Farooq Ahmed, officer-in-charge of Jatrabari police station, said the injured policemen were taken to the hospital and given first aid.

Earlier on November 19, the HC ordered the suspension of



Clashes broke out in Chattogram as police dispersed Hindu community protests over Chinmoy Krishna Das's bail rejection

rickshaw pullers and the police at the Dayaganj intersection, leaving two policemen injured. After gathering for about three hours from 9am to 12 noon, they took a position on the road and wanted to stop traffic, but police stopped them at Dayaganj junction.

However, the area saw normal traffic as rickshaw pullers left the road around 12:30pm. Md Saleh Uddin, deputy commissioner of police (Wari division) of the DMP, said, "Rickshaw drivers blocked the road at the junction and demanded the right to ply battery-powered rickshaws on major roads."

"As there was a serious traffic jam in the area and the police asked them to leave the road. However, they ignored the request and attacked the police instead. Two police officers were injured and are currently being treated in hospital," he added. Three

battery-operated rickshaws in the Dhaka metropolitan area within three days. The HC bench of Justice Fatema Najeeb and Justice Mahmudur Razi passed the order.

The home secretary, local government secretary, IGP, Dhaka metropolitan police commissioner, and two city corporation authorities of Dhaka have been asked to implement the court order.

Mentionable, approximately 13 lakh rickshaws, many of which run on batteries, are currently in service in Dhaka. Older pedal-powered rickshaws are also being equipped with batteries. The HC has banned the battery-operated rickshaws as they are unsafe and illegal. ■

Bangladesh's Ports Open To All



Business Outlook Report

Home Affairs Adviser Lieutenant General (Retd) Md Jahangir Alam Chowdhury affirmed Bangladesh's commitment to keeping its ports open to all.

"Bangladesh's ports are open to all, and the country is not captive to anyone to the point of only serving them," he said in response to a question about the arrival of a vessel from Karachi in Chattogram during a view-exchange meeting with journalists at the Media Centre of Chattogram Metropolitan Police (CMP) on November 19. "A ship went to a country from the Middle East. Is

there any restriction on ships coming to our country? Our port is open to all," he said. "The ship brought dates, onions, and potatoes, which are very essential for Ramadan. Will we not let these things come to our country? Those who are spreading such rumours are enemies of our country," the adviser added.

The adviser expressed concern over the recent wholesale filing of cases in different parts of the country, noting that most of them are false. "Previously, police used to file these fake cases, but now the people are doing it. They file cases against 10 identified people and 50 unidentified ones without

any evidence," said the adviser. The home adviser also criticised the foreign media, particularly from a neighbouring country, for spreading what he called "propaganda" about Bangladesh. "Propaganda is being spread in the media of a neighbouring country about Bangladesh. Only you (journalists) can counter these lies," observed Jahangir.

"It is not that we never make mistakes. If we do, point them out. If anyone commits a crime, report it. But don't spread false or misleading news. This benefits the neighbouring countries," he suggested. The law and order situation in Chattogram is relatively good but not

entirely satisfactory. The situation during the last Durga Puja was better, though it did not get much publicity, Jahangir commented. Replying to another question, he said, "Police officers who have not joined their duties are now being considered criminal. However, the confidence of the on-duty law enforcers has improved significantly compared to the previous situation."

Inspector General of Police (IGP) Mainul Islam, RAB Director General Md Shahidur Rahman, and CMP Commissioner Hasib Aziz were present at the meeting, among others. ■



RMG Sector Caught Between A Rock And A Hard Place

Buyers demand more, pay less

Business Outlook Report

Bangladeshi ready-made garment (RMG) manufacturers find themselves in a growing dilemma: while international buyers demand stricter compliance with labour rights, including wage hikes and improved working conditions, they, especially those from the US and EU, simultaneously offer lower prices for goods. This contradiction is placing immense pressure on the industry, raising concerns about its sustainability and future viability.

Exporters have expressed grave concerns over the falling prices, warning that this trend could severely undermine efforts to ensure compliance with labour rights. They also predict the potential closure of around 300 factories within a year, alongside a decline in the country's overall export revenues. The local RMG makers claimed that currently the buyers of USA offer overall 5%-8% less prices while EU buyers offer 6%-7% less compared to previ-

ous prices. According to the Office of Textiles and Apparel (OTEXA) undertakes industry analysis, contributes to US trade policy development, the price of cotton knitted sweater declined 9.2% in piece in USA market in January to September of 2024 compared to its corresponding previous period. The price of M/B cotton woven Trouser declined 8.4%, the price of M/G cotton woven Trouser declined 4.8%, the price of M/B cotton woven Shirts declined 4.7%, the price of cotton knitted T-Shirts declined 4.5% in the same period, the data also showed.

The data showed that the US apparel imports from Bangladesh declined 6.29% in January to September in 2024 compared to the same corresponding period last year. Bangladesh exported RMG products valued total \$5.78 billion in January to September in 2023 which figure was \$5.4billion in 2024. It accounts 5.51% negative in FY23 compared to last fiscal year. On the other hand, in

EU markets, the price of cotton knitted T-Shirts declined 8.36% in kg in January to August in 2024 compared to its corresponding previous period, according to Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union. The price of M/B cotton woven Trouser declined 7.24%, the price of cotton knitted sweater declined 6.13% and W/G cotton woven trouser reduced 6.97% in the same period, the data also showed.

According to Export Promotion Bureau, Bangladesh exported total \$55.56 billion in fiscal year 2023. Of this, the RMG sector earned \$47 billion in the fiscal year. Bangladesh exported \$23.53 billion in EU countries in the fiscal year 2023 while the country earned \$8.5 billion in USA market.

Bangladesh's RMG Exports To Fall, 300 Factories May Shut By One Year

Sparrow Apparels Ltd Managing Director Shovon Islam said he has

been exporting RMG products in both EU and USA for long years. “We are very concerned and facing severe challenges as the buyers offer less prices now amid high production costs, and fulfilling the 18-point demands from labours. The tight monetary policy, higher energy cost, wages, and bank interest rate created much challenges for us,” he also said. Shovon, one of top-10 exporters in the country, said buyers know about the destabilization situation goes on in Bangladesh so they offer lower prices. They are trying to take the advantages. “Many letters were sent by BGMEA to the buyers to increase prices to ensure compliance but they reduce the prices amid high manufacturing costs. We fear of declining overall exports in coming days. In the last nine months, 200 factories have been shut. Additional around 200-300 factories may shut due to the falling prices,” he claimed. There are more than 2000 RMG exporters in Bangladesh. And 40 lakh employees are directly working in the industry. “Now workers are demonstrating at several factories as the factories cannot afford to pay salaries due time. Amid the situation, the falling prices of the country’s RMG products will make another challenge. Sadly, we don’t get enough support from the government. The apex apparel trade body cannot operate led by an administrator,” he highlighted.

Factories Face A Constant Struggle To Balance Operational Costs

Mohiuddin Rubel, former director of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), said falling prices for Bangladeshi garments raise sustainability concerns. As the industry expanded, so did the cost of doing business. Over the past five years, production costs have surged by a staggering 50%, he said. He highlighted that this increase stems from a combination of factors – rising wages, escalating utility expenses, and a sharp uptick in raw material prices. Bank interest rate also

gone up, while costs like airfreight has increased exorbitantly in recent months. Factories face a constant struggle to balance operational costs without compromising competitiveness. “Buyers are not paying us fair prices. Workers’ wages have increased, we have to comply, but they are not increasing prices accordingly. Global clothing prices have also decreased. Competing exporters are also going up competition. Buyers will want to give us lower prices, but sometimes we ourselves are reducing prices in the name of



competition to fill our capacity. Overall, the prices of our clothing products in the US and EU markets have decreased,” he said.

Mohiuddin, also additional managing director of Denim Expert Limited added that as Bangladesh continues to lead in sustainability efforts, fostering a collaborative mindset across the supply chain is vital. Buyers, manufacturers, and stakeholders must work together to align expectations and ensure that the value created through responsible practices is reflected in pricing structures.

According to him, the garment industry is poised for a brighter, more sustainable future. By addressing challenges holistically and working collaboratively, stakeholders can create an environment where both sustainability and fair compensation

thrive—paving the way for shared growth and success.

Collaborative Action, Systemic Support Crucial To Secure Fair Pricing, Protect RMG Industry

According to another entrepreneur of the sector Md Salauddin, “We need to work out something to get better fair price, Since COVID-19, Bangladeshi exporters have faced compounded challenges, from political unrest to a mounting burden of bank loans. These obstacles have severely weakened their ability to

negotiate or secure fair prices.” He added that a critical issue is the lack of reliable market data and analysis, leaving entrepreneurs without the tools to predict trends or make informed decisions.

“To overcome these barriers, a unified effort from industry leaders and policymakers is crucial. Establishing data-driven strategies and enhancing market insights can empower exporters to bargain effectively. Collaborative action and systemic support are needed to secure fair pricing and protect the RMG sector’s future.” To address this, industry owners, policymakers, and buying agents must unite to ensure fair pricing. Collaboration across the supply chain and firm policies to uphold responsible practices are essential, he concluded. ■

Open Tender To Find Temporary Operator Of New Mooring Terminal



Business Outlook Report

Chattogram Port Authority (CPA) is preparing to float an open tender to appoint a temporary operator for New Mooring Container Terminal (NCT) of the Chattogram port until a foreign one is entrusted with the role.

An open tender is an invitation to all eligible and qualified vendors without any additional restrictions or prerequisite criteria. The CPA has sent a proposal to the shipping ministry to amend some clauses in a 2018 govern-

ment directive, officially called a "Statutory Regulatory Order", which effectively limited bids, said CPA Chairman Rear Admiral SM Moniruz-zaman on November 19.

An open tender will ensure that the bidding is participatory, competitive and not discriminatory, he said while addressing a press conference at CPA auditorium on November 19, the first since he took office on August 10 right after the fall of the Awami League government. The agreement with the current operator, Saif

Powertec Ltd, will expire in the first week of January next year. It was appointed under a "direct procurement method", which stipulated that bids meet specific requirements.

A government-to-government agreement is currently in effect for the appointment of Dubai state-owned multinational logistics company DP World to run the NCT under public private partnership. DP World operates ports around the world, from Hong Kong to Buenos Aires, and is

headquartered at its flagship Jebel Ali Port in Dubai. A consultation firm, officially termed "international transaction adviser", has also been appointed to fix the terms and conditions.

It will take around a year to get the documents from the "international transaction adviser", said the CPA chairman. The NCT, with its five container jetties, handles over 60 percent of the Chattogram port's containers. The Chattogram port, Bangladesh's premier seaport, handles

roughly 90 percent of the South Asian country's annual \$125 billion trade with the rest of the world. Today, it is the 67th busiest container port in the world and in 2022, it handled 31.4 lakh TEUs of containers.

Apart from the NCT, the Chattogram port has a Chittagong Container Terminal, a Patenga Container Terminal and a General Cargo Berth.

Additional expansion projects—a Laldia multi-purpose terminal and Bay Terminal—are currently being implemented. In another development, a new shipping liner service has directly connected the Port of Karachi in Pakistan to the Chattogram port, saving time and costs, he said.

Previously, cargo was transported between the two countries via

transshipment ports in Colombo and Singapore, he said. The new service will connect several countries like the United Arab Emirates, Indonesia, Malaysia and India, said the CPA chairman.

For the first time, a container vessel named MV Yang Xiang Fa Zhan arrived at the Chattogram port from Karachi on November 11. It contained 328

import-laden containers, including 264 from Karachi and the rest from Jebel Ali Port. The vessel left for Indonesia on the following day.

The vessel had a capacity to carry 2,300 containers and the shipping liner would continue operating on the route if imports increase, added the CPA chairman. ■

Efficient Cross-Border Trade A Boon For LDC Graduation



With the increase in international trade of Bangladesh, efficient cross-border trade will have notable implications for the country's status graduation from the least developed country (LDC) to a developing one, said Mahbubur Rahman, president of the International Chamber of Commerce Bangladesh (ICCB).

"Therefore, understanding the foreign business partners is crucial," he told a workshop on "Trade Finance Legal Challenges and International Sanctions

Regime & Requirements" on November 23. The ICCB, credit rating agency Moody's and ICC United Arab Emirates (UAE) jointly hosted the event at Renaissance Dhaka Gulshan Hotel in the capital. Financing of international trade transactions plays a crucial role in facilitating global commerce, said Rahman.

However, the whole process operates within a complex legal framework shaped by regulatory requirements, including sanctions, presenting significant challenges for financial

institutions and businesses dealing with international trade, he said. "Therefore, financial institutions and businesses must navigate a labyrinth of sanctions imposed by various jurisdictions," he said. "These sanctions can target specific countries, entities, or individuals, and often differ between regions, leading to complexities in ensuring compliance," Rahman said.

Banks are obligated to conduct thorough due diligence to prevent money laundering and terrorist financing, he said. This

involves verifying the identities of clients and understanding the nature of their business activities, which can be resource-intensive and legally complex, he added. The ICCB president highlighted the recent trades in the global economic and political arena and added that the evolving geopolitical landscape has increased the compliance requirements for banks and businesses engaged in international trade.

To navigate these challenges, financial institutions and businesses should establish comprehensive policies follow regulatory requirements and educate employees on the latest developments in sanctions, laws and compliance obligations, he added. ICCB Secretary General Aatur Rahman moderated the workshop. Mohamed Daoud, director and industry practice lead for Moody's Financial Crime Compliance across the Middle East and India, and Vincent O'Brien, director of ICCB-UAE, were present. ■



Govt To Procure LNG, Fertiliser, Rice To Meet Growing Demand

The rice would be purchased from an Indian company at Tk56.59 per kg

Business Outlook Report

The government on November 21 approved separate proposals for procuring two cargoes of LNG, 2.30 lakh tonnes of fertiliser and 50,000 tonnes of non-Basmati boiled rice in a bid to meet the growing demand of the country. The rice would be imported from Indian company M/S SAEL Agri Commodities Ltd through international Open Tender Method (OTM) against around Tk282.96 crore, putting per kilogram rice price at Tk56.59.

The approval was given in meeting of the Advisers Council Committee on Government Purchase held at the Cabinet Division Conference Room at Bangladesh Secretariat with Finance Adviser Dr Salehuddin Ahmed in the chair. Cabinet Division officials said, Petrobangla would procure one cargo LNG from M/S Vitol Asia Pte Ltd Singapore through international quotation at a cost of Tk686.39 crore where per MMBtu LNG would cost \$14.55. Petrobangla would procure another cargo LNG

from M/S Vitol Asia Pte Ltd Singapore through international quotation for around Tk680.25 crore where per MMBtu LNG would cost \$14.42. Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC) would procure 30,000 tonnes of MOP fertiliser from Russian JSC Foreign Economic Corporation “Prodintorg” under state-level agreement against a cost of Tk104.31 crore. BADC would also procure 40,000 tonnes of MOP fertiliser from Canadian Commercial Corporation under state-level agreement at a cost of Tk139.08 crore.

BADC would purchase another consignment 40,000 tonnes of MOP fertiliser from Canadian Commercial Corporation under state-level agreement with around Tk139.08 crore. Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC) would procure some 90,000 tonnes of bulk granular urea fertiliser and 30,000 tonnes of bulk prilled urea fertiliser. The BCIC would purchase 30,000 metric tonnes of bulk granular urea fertiliser from

Fertiglobe Distribution Limited, UAE with around Tk128.99 crore. BCIC would also purchase 30,000 metric tonnes of bulk granular urea fertiliser from Qatar Energy with around Tk128.99 crore. The BCIC would import 30,000 metric tonnes of bulk prilled urea fertiliser from SABIC Agri-nutrients Company Ltd, Saudi Arabia with around Tk131.40 crore.

BCIC would procure 30,000 metric tonnes of bulk granular urea fertiliser from SABIC Agri-nutrients Company Ltd, Saudi Arabia with around Tk128.99 crore. The meeting approved a proposal for appointing e-Learning and Earning Ltd, Dhaka as the training firm with around Tk297.16 crore for providing training to some 28,800 youths under a project. Besides, the Purchase committee also approved two proposals from the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education and from the Road Transport and Highways Division. ■

Pricing Reform May Reduce Fuel Costs By Tk10 - 15/litre



Business Outlook Report

Bangladesh can reduce fuel prices by Tk10 to Tk15 per litre if the government reforms its fuel price setting system, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) has suggested.

During a dialogue titled “Market-based Fuel Pricing: Government-led Initiatives and Possible Revision” held in Dhaka on November 21, CPD experts highlighted that the current pricing model, based on an automated system introduced in March 2024, has faced criticism due to its financial and fiscal impacts. Under this model, fuel prices are set according to a formula designed to ease the government’s fiscal

burden, as part of the conditions for an International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan. However, the formula has not been entirely well-received, and general consumers as well as business people have called for its revision.

Dr Khondaker Golam Moazzem, research director at CPD, emphasised that there is a scope of revising the fuel pricing method in a way that will both benefit consumers and eliminate the need for subsidies from the Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC). He also said BPC is already making significant profits, and these profits could be balanced to better serve consumer interests. This change could also have a

positive effect on electricity prices. The CPD’s study pointed out that a market-based pricing system, aligned with international standards, could potentially lower fuel prices by Tk10 to Tk15 per litre. The think-tank proposed adopting a more transparent, stable, and equitable pricing model using an Artificial Neural Network (ANN) approach.

This model would help mitigate the effects of exchange rate fluctuations and other market shocks, thus providing a more predictable and fair fuel pricing system. One of the major advantages of the ANN-based model is its ability to absorb shocks at the import stage, which

would help stabilise fuel prices. Additionally, the model would account for the socio-economic realities of the country, ensuring that the pricing system is responsive to the needs of consumers while also considering fiscal constraints. According to CPD, this approach could make fuel prices more stable and equitable, benefiting both the consumers and the national economy.

The dialogue also included discussions on the role of the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC), which has been tasked with overseeing fuel pricing. Helen Mashyat Preoty, senior research associate at CPD, stressed the importance of



approving the draft regulations prepared by BERC for fuel price determination. She called for immediate approval from the Ministry of Power, Energy, and Mineral Resources to give BERC the authority to regulate fuel prices comprehensively.

Preoty also recommended that BERC should take charge of monitoring and implementing the automated pricing model, ensuring its full transparency and accountability. She suggested that BERC could hold regular public hearings to engage consumers and other stakeholders, ensuring that the pricing process remains open and fair. According to Preoty, the

adoption of the ANN-based model would aid in long-term energy planning. By offering predictive insights into future fuel costs, the model would enable both consumers and policy-makers to make better plans for transitions to alternative energy sources. This foresight is crucial for aligning energy policies with sustainable development goals.

In his remarks, Moazzem pointed out that the current fuel pricing system is not sufficiently aligned with market dynamics and international standards. He argued that by using a more flexible, data-driven approach, the government could create a more

balanced pricing structure that would better reflect global fuel price trends while minimising the financial burden on consumers. The dialogue also highlighted the potential benefits of a revised pricing system beyond the fuel market. By improving the pricing framework for fuel oils such as diesel, petroleum, octane, and kerosene, the government could promote energy efficiency and security.

The CPD's proposals are seen as a way to address some of the challenges that have arisen since the implementation of the current automated pricing formula. Since the system's introduction, many consumers have

raised concerns about the rising cost of fuel, which has contributed to higher living expenses. The reform is viewed as a necessary step to alleviate some of these pressures and make fuel pricing more equitable and transparent.

The dialogue was attended by BPC Chairman Md Amin Ul Ahsan, BERC Chairman Jalal Ahmed, Additional Secretary of the Energy and Mineral Resources Division Khalid Ahmed, Energy Adviser at the Consumers Association of Bangladesh Dr M Shamsul Alam, Bangladesh Independent Power Producers' Association Vice President Humayun Rashid, and others. ■

AL's FDI Bubble Bursts



Apu Ahmed

Publicity by the immediate past Awami League government during its three full and one partial terms will surpass all efforts of the previous governments in the realm of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), which fell to a decade low in FY24.

WB Provides Concept

Before its fall on August 5 in the face of a mass uprising, the AL regime, which began its first tenure in January 2009, had the longest period in a row for preparing its economic policies and implementing those. Ensuring a more flow of FDI was one of the major economic policies of the AL regime, led by Sheikh Hasina, since the second five-year tenure started after the controversial election in January 2014 boycotted by almost all major political parties. As per the suggestion from the

World Bank, the AL regime grabbed the concept of establishing economic zones against the criticisms that the FDI flow in terms of gross domestic product was not encouraging.

Preference for Economic Zones

The WB successfully convinced the AL regime that popular export processing zones being operated since the late 1970s had already lacked necessary spaces to attract foreign investors. There are no vacant plots in Dhaka, Chattogram, Cumilla, Adamjee and Karnaphuli EPZs. Only a few plots remained open in Uttara, Ishwardi and Mongla EPZs for investors, but they are not enough for big industries. Besides, the WB pointed out that the economic zone concept was preferable to the EPZ to the foreign investors. Unlike EPZs, the products

manufactured in economic zones can be marketed in the domestic market and the foreign market. By 2015, Bangladesh was identified as a middle-income country for its GDP growth of around 6 per cent. The growing number of consumers can afford products from the economic zones, an added advantage for foreign investors. Like the EPZ, the duty and tax benefits are also there in the economic zones.

FDI Needed Badly

Without the higher flow of FDI, the economists warned that the country's balance of payment would face problems. The incomes from exports, remittance and loans from foreign and bilateral lenders would not be enough to keep the pace of the import-led economy. So, the early initiatives by the AL regime in establishing economic zones,

including special economic zones, were welcomed by many as the country needed a new growth driver to reduce its overreliance on ready-made garments. The FDI would ensure technology transfer which is badly needed for the diversification of the export basket and the creation of employment, one of the underlying reasons for the student-led mass uprising.

Careful Planning Imperative

Experts, however, cautioned about the success of the SEZ as their attainment varied in different countries. They said the economic zones required careful planning. They also said special economic zones should only be used to address market failures or binding constraints that cannot be addressed through other options. If the constraints can be addressed through countrywide reforms, incentives, or universal approaches, zones might not be necessary. The AL regime was hungry for success stories on the economic front amid a falling banking sector hamstrung by loan theft, non-performing loans, falling local private investment, revenue losses, higher borrowing to meet the yawning budget deficit and corruption.

AL Busy In Listing

Replicating the Chinese success in industrialisation, the AL regime was confined to listing economic zones without any effective action to remove other constraints. Some 97 economic zones have been listed throughout the country. Of them, 68 have been planned for setting up by the government and the rest 29 by the private sector investors from home and abroad throughout the country, with the initial deadline of 2030, already extended to 2041. Operation in some 10 economic zones has begun partially, but others are behind deadlines because of delays in infrastructural development while many zones, taken without any feasibility studies, still

remain at the approval stage.

Corruption, Hassle Major Barriers

Facilitating easy access to land for foreign investors in the land-scarce Bangladesh with necessary infrastructure has been the main idea of the new concept, former World Bank Dhaka office chief economist Zahid Hussain points out. But translating the idea into reality has become challenging for several reasons, he adds. As the major reasons, economists identify the implementing agencies' inefficiency, politicisation of the investor selection process, flawed planning and corruption. They said the combination of the factors overshadowed the initial steps by the Bangladesh Economic Zone Authority. Besides, some of the special economic zones have been approved for political consideration without any feasibility studies.

White Elephant

For example, Anwara Economic Zone-2 in Chattogram across River Karnaphuli was awarded to Chinese investors exclusively in 2015. To

With the interim government, led by Prof Muhammad Yunus, assuming power, the prospect of Indian economic zones in the country becomes complicated, the officials observe. The establishment of proposed economic zones by India in National Special Economic Zones at Mirsarai, Mongla and Kushtia had already slowed down due to the global financial crisis from the war in Ukraine since 2022. Besides, many politicians and bureaucrats reportedly persuaded then-Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to approve around two dozens of economic zones without any feasibility studies, overburdening the BEZA.

Insignificant Progress

BEZA insiders said 10 economic zones -- three under the government initiative and seven under the private initiative -- had made progress over the past one decade. The National Special Economic Zone at Mirsarai, the Sreehatta Economic Zone in Sylhet and the Jamalpur Economic Zone in Jamalpur are built by the government. City Economic Zone, Meghna Industrial



facilitate easy access to the economic zone, a tunnel underneath the river has already been constructed at a cost of Tk 5,913 crore with loans from China. But the economic zone itself has made little progress so far.

Economic Zone, Meghna Economic Zone, Abdul Monem Economic Zone, Bay Economic Zone and Aman Economic Zone are built and operated by private groups with the government giving land to them.

The National Special Economic Zone at Mirsarai made the highest progress as several companies started factories there in 2022. Of them, Asian Paints Bangladesh Nippon-McDonald—a joint venture company of Japan's Nippon Steel Corporation and Bangladesh's McDonald Steel Building Products Ltd—is the forerunner in establishing factories on at least two-third area of the Mirsarai Economic Zone covering a total area of 33,805 acres, or 136.38 square kilometres, bigger than the Dhaka South City Corporation covering 109 square kilometres.

National SEZ

The Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority in this zone had readied the industrial plots by implementing the first phase of a project costing an estimated Tk 2,685 crore for building on-site infrastructure and Tk 2,862 crore on off-site infrastructure with at least three years delay from the deadline of 2019. The feasibility study of this zone shows another investment of around Tk 3,000 crore would be required to complete the second and third phases to ready the remaining areas by 2028. But right now, the BEZA is facing problems in realising Tk 85 crore in arrears as lease fees of 500 acres of land allocated to a consortium of Sikder Group, Bashundhara Group and GasMin Ltd in the National SEZ in Mirsarai. In 2018, the BEZA leased out the land to the consortium for development by 2020 for industrial establishment. Since the consortium has failed to complete the task the BEZA may scrap the deal. The case remains as an example of the wrong selection of investors, while allegations remain that investors are deprived of scopes of investment.

New BEZA Management

Chowdhury Ashik Mahmud Bin Harun, executive chairman of both the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority and Special Economic Zones Authority, said

recently expressed disappointment with the slow development of infrastructure in the National SEZ, formerly known as Bangabandhu Shilpa Park at Mirsarai, Feni and Sitakunda. He said it would take around 20 years to make the National SEZ fully operationalized. He has already said they would focus on a minimum of five and a maximum of 10 economic zones. Emphasis would only be given on specific timelines to address the needs of the investors in a realistic way, he said, adding that investors prefer stable policies to only tax



waivers. Bangladesh's ranking in ease of doing business is 168th among 190 economies, a crucial factor for potential foreign investors. The BEZA executive chairman said that the country ranked 149th in the Corruption Perception Index in 2023, indicating significant challenges to investor confidence. He also was not surprised by the tiny flow of Asia's \$620 billion in FDI against the backdrop of poor ease of doing business conditions and massive corruption.

FDI Falling

The FDI flow to the country in FY23-24 dropped to a decade low. The FDI in FY 24 fell by 8.80 per cent to \$1.47 billion from \$1.6 billion in FY23 and \$3.44 billion in

FY22, according to Bangladesh Bank. The FDI flow in FY23-24 has been the lowest in the past decade. In FY13-14, the country received \$1.48 billion, according to the central bank. Available data shows that the BEZA received \$28.75 billion worth of investment proposals from companies at home and abroad, but the actual investment stood at around \$6.00 billion between 2020 and June 30, 2023. On August 6, 2018, Japan Tobacco Inc announced acquiring the tobacco business of Akij Group at an estimated \$ 1,476 million, marking

the single biggest FDI. Akij Group was not established in EPZ but was still able to attract foreign investors due to suitable market conditions. The takeover was also excluded from the hassles in the documentation process a new investor faces in the economic zones or the outside economic zones.

Barriers Remain

The failure of the AL regime to attract FDI should be linked more with constraints faced by investors in investing in economic zones. Besides, its shyness to make reforms and remove the barriers is not least important. ■



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Potato Goes Out Of Platters For Many

Apu Ahmed

Potatoes have seen a surge in their prices in recent months, reaching a five-year high of Tk 75 per kg, according to the price chart of the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh. Only in 2020, it sold at Tk 50 a kg, the previous highest. This sharp increase in the prices of the essential kitchen item has sparked widespread concern, particularly among low-income households who are already struggling amid inflationary pressure.

Poor Exclude Potato

The prices are linked to old potatoes. New potatoes have arrived in the market with their price hovering around Tk 140 per kg. The high price of the new potato with the advent of the winter season is not unexpected and unusual. But the price of old potatoes surprised all and sundries. Many middle-income households have excluded the item for most days of the week while low-income households can hardly afford the tuber in a month. The

volatility in the price of potatoes in the local market has already forced the interim government to cut duties on the import of the item, used mostly as vegetables, unlike other countries across the world.

Govt Fails to Check Price Volatility

However, the interim government cannot check the price hikes of potatoes that are consumed as a staple food by boiling, baking, roasting, steaming, mashing, frying, or cooking on the barbecue in most countries across the world. The item is used mostly in curries in Bangladesh and its neighbouring areas in West Bengal of India after it has emerged as the second most agricultural output after rice. The cultivation of potatoes in this part of the world began during the 18th century under British rule and the cultivation gained in popularity after the country's independence in 1971 with the introduction of high-yielding varieties. The volatility in the price of potatoes in the local market was

almost absent even a decade ago.

Supply Glut

Moreover, as the country became the seventh largest producer of tuber crops in the world, it had to struggle to offer potato growers a tangible solution to the yearly market glut and ensure fair prices. Each year farmers in the country produce in excess of 10 million tonnes of potato with at least two million tonnes in exportable surpluses. During the military-backed caretaker administration in 2007-08, an order came from the top brass of Bangladesh's armed forces that the soldiers and sailors would receive potatoes with their daily rations. But in a country where rice is overwhelmingly the staple dish, this was an unpopular idea. The country's struggling potato growers in Rangpur and Bogura, Munshiganj and Dinajpur found a potential export market a few years back to market surplus potatoes when potato-deficit country Russia showed interest in the locally grown tuber. A

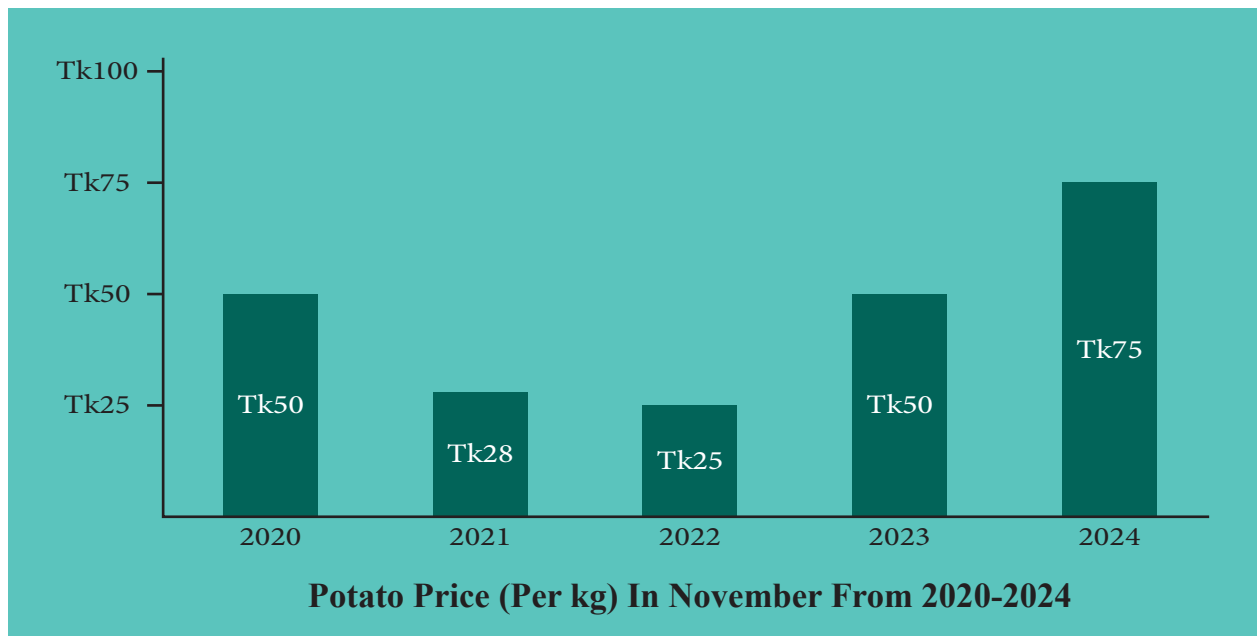
good amount of potatoes was also sent to Russia before the market was shut down on allegations of sending low-quality potatoes.

Supply Deficit

However, the scenario in the overall potato market has changed over the last several years as the country becomes a potato-deficit country from a surplus one. The volatility in the price of food items, including potatoes, has pushed up inflation to a

of National Consumer Rights Protection told a local private television that they slapped a Tk 2 lakh fine on three potato traders for selling potatoes at higher rates than usual. The officials said the price of local and imported potatoes should not exceed Tk 45, but the traders were selling the item at Tk 65 per kg. However, many believe that realising fines does not give any tangible outcome to check the price manipulation. Instead, the business establish-

farmers from growing potatoes, said the association President Mostafa Azad Chowdhury. He claimed that 20 per cent of the storage capacity of the cold storage remained unused in the past potato season. However, the government agencies, including the Department of Agricultural Extension, calculated the potato production at 10 million tonnes plus. The cold storage association had suggested the government make a buffer of one million tonnes of potatoes to increase



decade-high for the past two years. A widespread allegation of market manipulation was made during the autocratic regime of Awami League, which was ousted on August 5 in the face of a mass uprising, for the price hikes of essentials. People became optimistic that market manipulators would be checked under the interim government. However, the expectation has not been fulfilled as volatility in the price of potatoes and other items still continues. Agricultural experts said the price of potatoes should not exceed Tk 40-45 per kg. They blamed hoarders and wholesalers for the price hike of potatoes.

Monitoring Drives

On November 25, the assistant director, Abdus Salam, of the Directorate

ments should be closed down for some specific period. Recouping the amount of fine is a matter of time for the errant traders, they said.

Miscalculation

Market vigilance and monitoring would have not been required had the government settled the demand and supply management properly. The observation was made by Bangladesh Cold Storage Association leaders. According to calculations by the association, the potato production in the country in the past season is around 7.5 million tonnes to 8.0 million tonnes due to seasonal factors like rain in winter. Besides the seasonal factor, price hikes of ingredients, fuel oil price hikes and high transportation costs discourage

the supply and check the price hikes of the item. But the suggestion was not given due consideration by the immediate past government.

No Quick Solution

Not only in the case of potatoes, but the mismatch in demand and supply of many other items, including eggs, rice, wheat, sugar and edible oil, have also created scopes for the traders to manipulate the prices and market as well. It has been reported that the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics carried out the wishes of the previous AL regime to generate data that according to economists caused the market destabilisation. The fixation of such a destabilised market quickly is a difficult task. ■



Tariff Cuts Fail To Ease Rice Market Woes

Business Outlook Report

Sharifa Begum, a garment worker in Dhaka, faces a daily struggle to put food on her family's table. "Even coarse rice costs more than Tk50 per kilogram," she laments. "For families like mine, this is unaffordable."

Despite the government's efforts to reduce rice prices through significant import tariff cuts and increased import approvals, the promised relief remains elusive for people like Sharifa. The government recently slashed the import duty on rice from 62% to just 2%, a move intended to lower import costs by over Tk24 per kilogram,

according to the National Board of Revenue (NBR). To further stabilise the market, 277 private organisations were approved to import 1,441,000 tonnes of rice between 7 and 17 November, with the stipulation that the staple be marketed between 10 and 22 December.

However, by 20 November, only 8,210 tonnes of rice had been imported – an insignificant fraction of the approved amount. Meanwhile, government rice stocks have plummeted to 808,710 tonnes, down sharply from 1.4 million tonnes in August, according to the Ministry of Food. Market data paints

a grim picture. The Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) reports that rice prices are 8%–12% higher than the same period last year, contributing to a food inflation rate of 12.66%. Medium-grade rice prices have risen 5.98% in the past month and 12.73% over the year, while fine-quality rice prices have increased by 2.78% monthly and 8.03% annually.

Retailers noted slight reductions of Tk1–2 per kilogram for some coarse rice varieties, primarily from the Aman paddy harvest. However, these minor changes have barely made a dent in the inflated

prices of other types. Premium varieties like Katari Nazir still sell for Tk72–78 per kilogram, Jeerashail (Miniket) for Tk65–70, and medium-grade BR-18 and BR-29 for Tk60–62.

The Aman season typically brings some relief as fresh harvests hit the market. However, retailers like Md Polsah of Motlab Traders in Mirpur say prices have not fallen as expected. "Supply is improving, but prices remain stubbornly high," he remarked.

The Root Causes

Experts cite multiple factors behind the ongoing price crisis. Agro-econo-

mist Dr Jahangir Alam Khan noted that adverse weather conditions, including floods, have disrupted rice production. Political unrest has further complicated supply chains, driving up costs, he added.

Moreover, the rice market in Bangladesh is dominated by 10–12 corporate entities. Market insiders warn that significant price

reductions are unlikely unless these corporations lower their rates. “Strict monitoring is essential,” said SM Nazer Hossain, vice-president of the Consumer Association of Bangladesh (CAB).

“If large corporations hoard imported rice, it won’t reach consumers. Without oversight, prices will remain high, regard-

less of policy changes,” he argued.

Hope For Relief?

As more Aman paddy is harvested in December, there is hope for some price reduction. Yet, for families like Sharifa’s, even small decreases may not be enough.

“We work hard just to survive, but even the most

basic food is slipping out of reach,” she said, her voice heavy with worry.

Bangladesh’s rice market, a lifeline for millions, remains at the mercy of systemic challenges. Without better enforcement and corporate accountability, the plight of consumers like Sharifa may only worsen, concluded market analysts. ■

Five Banks To Raise Tk 2,000cr Thru Bonds



Five scheduled banks have received the nod from the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC) to raise a total of Tk 2,000 crore to strengthen their capital base by issuing bonds.

Islami Bank will raise Tk 500 crore, Trust Bank Tk 450 crore, Dhaka Bank Tk 400 crore, Bank Asia Tk 400 crore and Exim Bank Tk 250 crore, according to a press release issued by the BSEC on November 19. Islami Bank will raise funds by issuing fifth mudaraba

unsecured, non-convertible, fully redeemable, floating rate subordinated bonds. Trust Bank will raise funds by issuing unsecured, non-convertible, fully redeemable, subordinated bonds.

The coupon rate of both bonds will be the same as the reference rate, meaning the six-month moving average rate of treasury bills plus an additional 3 percent. The face value of each unit of the two bonds will be Tk 5 lakh. Bank Asia and Dhaka Bank got the nod from the stock

regulator to raise funds by issuing unsecured, non-convertible, fully redeemable, floating-rate bonds. The face value of each unit of Dhaka Bank’s bond will be Tk 10 lakh, while the face value of each unit of Bank Asia’s bond will be Tk 1 crore, according to the press release.

Exim Bank will raise funds by issuing unsecured, non-convertible, redeemable, floating-rate subordinated bonds. Its coupon rate will be the reference rate and an additional 3

percent. The face value of each unit of the bond is Tk 5 lakh. Subordinated bonds are ones that rank below other, more senior loans or securities with respect to claims on assets or earnings.

An unsecured bond refers to one that is not backed by any assets, while “non-convertible” indicates that it cannot be converted into shares or equities. Redeemable bonds can be redeemed or paid off by the issuer prior to the maturity date. ■



Shahjalal Islami Bank won the first prize (gold award) at 'ICMAB Best Corporate Award-2023' for its performance in various indicators based on the banks annual reports for 2023. The bank received the award from the Institute of Cost and Management Accountants of Bangladesh (ICMAB) in the 'Private Commercial Bank (Islamic Operation)' category. Mosleh Uddin Ahmed, the bank's managing director, received the award from Dr. Salehuddin Ahmed, finance adviser of the interim government. ■



The 69th Annual General Meeting of Bangladesh Gas Fields Company Limited (BGFCL) was held at Petrobangla in Dhaka. Mohammad Mohsin, Chairman, BGFCL Board, presided over the meeting. The Chairman of Petrobangla (Grade-1) Zanendra Nath Sarker and the shareholders and BGFCL's Board of Directors attended the meeting. ■



The 19th annual general meeting of Japan Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry (JBCCI) was held at a city hotel. Japanese Ambassador Iwama Kiminori was present as the chief guest. ■



SAJIDA Foundation held its 31st Annual General Meeting at its Head Office in Dhaka recently. The meeting was presided over by Farooq Sobhan, Chairman of the Governing Body. Other board members and senior management of SAJIDA Foundation were also present. ■



BRAC Bank's deposit grew by Tk 100 billion in the first 10 months of the year despite a challenging environment, showcasing the bank's strong market presence and customer trust, according to a press release. ■



Prime Bank PLC has recently signed an agreement with Concord Architects & Interior Decor Limited at the bank's corporate office. Under this agreement, Prime Bank cardholders are set to enjoy exclusive benefits on design consultancy services & execution from Concord Architects & Interior Decor Limited. Additionally, cardholders can experience special discounts on stays at the popular Fantasy Kingdom and Foy's Lake Resort. ■



Social Islami Bank PLC celebrated 29th anniversary with various programmes at its Head Office in Dhaka. Chairman of the bank Dr M Sadiqul Islam was present as the chief guest. Vice Chairman Maksuda Begum and Directors Md Morshed Alam Khondoker and Md Anwar Hossain were also present at the event presided over by Managing Director (Acting) Mohammad Forkanullah. ■



The 24th annual general meeting of ICB Capital Management Limited (ICML), a subsidiary of Investment Corporation of Bangladesh (ICB), was held at the head office of the company in the capital's Kakrail. Md Abul Hossain, chairman of the board of directors of ICML, presided over the meeting. ■



Janata Bank PLC started Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS) activities through its JB NIKASH SOLUTION. Managing Director Md Mazibur Rahman inaugurated the software as the chief guest. Higher executives of the bank were present on the occasion. ■



EBL, DANISH EMBASSY TO PROMOTE CLIMATE ACTIONS: The Embassy of Denmark in Dhaka will collaborate with Eastern Bank to achieve the common goal of promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation in Bangladesh. A joint 'Declaration of Intent' was signed by Danish Ambassador to Bangladesh H.E. Christian Brix Møller and EBL's Additional Managing Director Ahmed Shaheen at the Embassy of Denmark in the capital. ■



Modhumoti Bank recently signed an agreement to become the title sponsor of 26th National Cricket League (NCL) 2024-25, a tournament organised by Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB). The cricket contest kicked off on October 19, 2024. Humayun Kabir, chairman of the bank's board of directors, handed over a cheque to Faruque Ahmed, president of the BCB, at the bank's head office in the capital's Gulshan. ■



IFC, a member of the World Bank Group, and City Bank PLC signed a partnership agreement at the head office of City Bank recently. Aziz Al Kaiser, Chairman, and Mashrur Arefin, Managing Director & CEO of City Bank, and Martin Holtmann, Country Manager, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal of IFC, and Allen Forlemu, IFC Regional Industry Director of Financial Institutions Group for Asia & Pacific, were present. ■



Bumper Aman Paddy Yield Brings Joy To Farmers In Chapainawabganj

Business Outlook Report

Farmers in Chapainawabganj are celebrating a bumper yield of Aman paddy this season, coupled with favourable prices, thanks to supportive weather conditions and effective farming practices. The Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) had set a target of producing 2 lakh metric tonnes of rice this year, and initial reports indicate that the district is on course to meet or even exceed this goal.

During a visit to various parts of the district, farmers were found busy with paddy harvesting and threshing, with fields bustling with activity. Despite early concerns about insufficient rainfall during the planting season, timely irrigation, adequate rainfall later on, and minimal pest infestations led to an impressive harvest. Farmers are reaping between 22 and 25 maunds of paddy per bigha, with each maund fetching between Tk 1,200 and Tk 1,300 in the market. These favourable conditions have provided

much-needed relief to farmers, many of whom struggled with high production costs earlier in the season.

Calls For Cost Reduction

Despite the promising yield and good prices, farmers have urged the government to address the rising costs of pesticides, irrigation, and fertilisers. Jahangir, a farmer from Atahar in Sadar Upazila, cultivated Aman on 10 bighas of land and expressed satisfaction with his harvest, expecting 24 maunds per bigha.

However, he noted that early irrigation and high input costs added to his expenses. “If the price remains stable, we will benefit, but reducing input costs would greatly encourage more farmers to engage in Aman cultivation,” he said. Similarly, Serajul, a farmer from Nezampur in Nachole Upazila, highlighted the financial strain caused by high labour and input costs. He called for government intervention to reduce

these expenses, ensuring sustainable farming practices in the region.

Surpassing targets

This year, Aman paddy cultivation exceeded expectations, with 54,415 hectares of land cultivated against the target of 53,350 hectares. According to Dr Palash Sarkar, Deputy Director of the DAE, the yield per hectare increased from 3.51 metric tonnes last year to 3.61 metric tonnes this year. Dr Sarkar attributed the success to the timely distribution of high-yielding seeds, fertilisers, and expert guidance provided through various projects and incentives.

“Currently, 16% of the fields have been harvested, and we anticipate this year’s total production will surpass last year’s figure of 1.89 lakh metric tonnes, reaching nearly 2 lakh metric tonnes,” he said. Farmers are hopeful that stable prices and reduced input costs in the future will ensure a prosperous Aman paddy season in the years to come. ■



BB's Leniency To Blame For Ailing Banking Sector

Business Outlook Report

Banking rules and regulations stipulate a single borrower exposure limit but the banking regulator itself disregarded the rule routinely in the last 16 years. Bangladesh Bank always allowed the limit to be exceeded on special consideration, which put the state-run banks in an ailing condition.

Banks are not allowed to lend more than 25 percent of their paid-up capital to a single party, as per the act. But the surprising move is that some lenders provided more than 500 percent as loans of their paid-up capital. For instance,

state-run Janata Bank's loan exposure to Beximco Group stood at Tk 25,000 crore, which is about 950 percent of the lenders' paid-up capital. As much as Tk 19,000 crore of the Beximco loans has become defaulted. The sprawling conglomerate took the huge amount of loans as the central bank allowed Janata to breach the limit.

In August last year, the banking regulator gave a no-objection certificate to extend loans amounting to Tk 479 crore to Beximco although the amount violated Janata's single borrower exposure limit. Despite objections from the Department of Off-Site

Supervision, the central bank wing responsible for monitoring and regulating banks, then governor Abdur Rouf Talukder gave the exemption to Beximco.

Not only the case of Beximco, the BB allowed state-run banks to exceed the exposure limit for many conglomerates including S Alam Group, Orion Group and Bashundhara Group. The controversial S Alam Group took out a huge amount of loans from Islami Bank. The Chattogram-based conglomerate dominated the board of the Shariah-based lender too. S Alam also took Tk 10,449.45 crore from

Janata, which was 451 percent of the state lender's paid-up capital. Three state-run banks -- Janata, Agrani and Rupali -- had approved Tk 10,579 crore in loans for a power plant of Orion Group far exceeding their limits thanks to policy relaxation by the BB.

The three lenders were able to approve such a big amount for Orion as the central bank had in November 2022 relaxed section 26-kha (1) of the Bank Company Act-1991 that states loans given by a bank to a single borrower shall not exceed 25 percent of the bank's capital. The BB relaxed the rule for

coal-based power companies for the next five years. It gave the no-objection certificates for the Orion power plant loans. However, the loans were later cancelled following an application by the business group. Orion secured approval for the syndicated loan based on the coal project's financial credibility and without any undue influence, said Salman Obaidul Karim, its managing director.

Bashundhara Group, one of the country's largest conglomerates, availed Tk 2,726 crore as loans in 2022 from five state-run banks -- Sonali, Rupali, Janata, Agrani and Bangladesh Development Bank -- under special consideration from BB for its gold refinery project. All of them except Bangladesh Development Bank exceeded the single borrower exposure limit. The scam-hit Janata bank, which is in deep trouble, approved the highest Tk 883 crore for the project. In this case, Bashundhara Group media adviser Mohammad Abu Tayeb said that the infrastructure of the gold refinery project is ready now and they are waiting for the machinery to arrive.

Banks have given loans to the project after proper assessment and inspection. In some cases, the banking regulator allowed the state-run lenders to exceed the exposure limit due to political pressure or pressure from influential quarters, said BB officials. However, BB spokesperson Husne Ara Shikha said

recently that the waiver from the single borrower exposure limit was given by the central bank to some clients for special purpose and special interest. "This type of waiver is given in case of many large projects," she added.

Deshbandhu Group recently applied to the BB to relax the single borrower exposure limit to import essential commodities ahead of Ramadan. The state-run banks are hostage to a few clients due to the frequent violation of exposure limit, industry



insiders said. A lender's risk increases when a single customer gets a large portion of the loans, sometimes even more than the client's capital, they added.

As of June of last year, Janata had the highest number of large loan borrowers (67) and the highest proportion of large borrowers that have exceeded the single borrower exposure limit of 25 percent of capital, central bank documents showed. Sonali had 21 large borrowers and 13 exceeded the single-bor-

rower exposure limit. Agrani had 55 large borrowers and 20 of their exposure was over the limit. As of June 30 last year, Rupali had 35 large borrowers and the exposure of 10 of them was above the ceiling set for a single borrower.

"Since the central bank itself allowed the banks to cross the single borrower exposure limit, there was no need to fix the limit," said Mustafa K Mujeri, former chief economist at the BB. Such waivers for certain clients are not legal.

The current ailing situation of the banking sector is the reflection of such waivers from rules and regulations, said Mujeri, also the executive director at the Institute for Inclusive Finance and Development.

"Laws and rules are made to be obeyed but what is the logic of having laws and policies when they are not obeyed? The central bank cannot deny the responsibility for the fragile situation of most of the banks," he added. At the end of September, the six

state-run commercial banks -- Agrani, Janata, Rupali, Sonali, Bangladesh Development Bank and BASIC Bank -- together had defaulted loans amounting to Tk 126,111.5 crore, which is 40.35 percent of their disbursed loans. Of the amount, Janata accounted for Tk 60,489 crore, Agrani Tk 26,891 crore, Sonali Tk 16,623 crore and Rupali Tk 12,738 crore.

The central bank should never allow the exposure limit to be exceeded as it is not meant for good gover-

nance, said Anis A Khan, former chairman of the Association of Bankers Bangladesh (ABB). Some large borrowers who are getting loans beyond their capacity now are not able to serve the interest payment of the loans.

The single borrower exposure limit can only be relaxed for importing essential commodities amid Ramadan and for the power sector because power is very important for the country, said Khan, also a former MD of Mutual Trust Bank. ■



BFIU Organises Workshop On Money Laundering In Rangpur

Business Outlook Report

Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU), with the joint cooperation of Care Bangladesh, Qatar Charity and ESDO, organised a Workshop on 'Prevention of money laundering and combating the financing of terrorism' at RDRS in Rangpur on November 23. The workshop was for the senior officials of local, national and international NGOs operating in Rangpur region to raise awareness about the prevention of money laundering and terrorist financing.

Director of BFIU Mohammad Anisur Rahman inaugurated the workshop as the chief guest. The opening ceremony was presided over by Dr. Ikhtiar Uddin Khandaker, Director - Health & Nutrition Care-Bangladesh. Md. Anwar Hossain, Director, of NGOAB, Dr. Mohammad Amin Hafiz Ahmed Omar, Country Director, of Qatar Charity, and Md. Zillur Rahman, Finance Controller and Head of

Compliance, Eco-Social Development Organization (ESDO) were present as a special guests in the opening ceremony of the workshop. Khadiza Mehnaz, Head of Internal Audit and Risk Management, at Care Bangladesh gave a welcome speech, said a press release. The chief guest of the program, Mohammad Anisur Rahman, Director of Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit, said that money laundering and financing of terrorism is not an internal problem of any country but it is an international problem. Due to strategic or systemic weaknesses in LDCs, foreign grants received by the NGO sector are often diverted, leaving the sector vulnerable to money laundering and terrorist financing.

He mentioned that Bangladesh has already received the good news of the transition from LDC. The NGO sector has a special role in the financial and social development of Bangladesh. Bangladesh's NGO

sector is also an important partner in this development. In this day-long workshop, 6 (six) sessions were held. NGO Affairs Bureau Director Mr. Md. Anwar Hossain and BFIU Joint Director Mr. Mohammad Ismail Pradhan, Md. Jaynul Abedeen and Deputy Director Md. Faisal Kabir and Khadiza Mehnaz, CAMLCO of Care Bangladesh conducted the sessions.

The Chair of the event, Dr. Ikhtiar Uddin Khandaker, Director - Health & Nutrition, Care-Bangladesh highlighted that the knowledge gained from this workshop will be instrumental in strengthening the framework and policies to prevent money laundering and terrorist financing. Representing the three partner organizations for this workshop, He emphasized in his address that all NGOs and development agencies must remain vigilant to ensure they are not exploited as new channels for money laundering or terrorist financing. ■



Money Launderers Emboldened Under Sheikh Family's Patronage

Business Outlook Report

Money launderers who funnelled hard-earned public funds abroad under the protection of the Sheikh family are now facing intensified scrutiny by government authorities.

Agencies empowered to investigate financial crimes are ramping up efforts to recover laundered funds. Alongside attempts to reclaim foreign assets, the National Board of Revenue (NBR) is moving to confiscate domestic assets linked to such illicit activities. The NBR's Central Intelligence Cell (CIC) has confirmed these developments.

Sheikh Family's Complicity In Laundering

Following the ouster of

Sheikh Hasina's Awami League government on 5 August amidst a mass uprising, rampant corruption and irregularities during its 16-year tenure have come to light. Notably, Sheikh Hasina's sister Sheikh Rehana and other family members were reportedly complicit in enabling money laundering.

Reports suggest that associates of the Sheikh family leveraged their connections to engage in financial crimes and launder significant amounts of money overseas. Allegations have surfaced that Sheikh Hasina's daughter, Saima Wazed Putul's ex-husband Khandaker Mashroor Hossain, was once detained in Dubai with laundered funds. Many politicians, bureaucrats,

and business leaders allegedly misused the family's protection to transfer illicit wealth abroad.

Those who have now established vast wealth and empires overseas are said to have benefitted directly from the family's endorsement. The authorities are actively investigating these claims as part of broader probes into corruption.

CIC's Ongoing Investigations

The CIC, under the NBR, has identified approximately 200 individuals, including politicians, businessmen, bureaucrats, law enforcement officers, and officials from financial institutions. These individuals and their families are suspected of tax evasion and money

laundering. Requests for information have been sent to foreign financial intelligence agencies to determine whether these individuals hold overseas assets.

If concrete evidence is obtained, the CIC plans to take stringent action against the offenders under existing laws.

Government Seeks International Support

As interim government chief adviser, Dr Muhammad Yunus has initiated dialogues with diplomats to seek their support in repatriating stolen funds. The government has sought assistance from 15 countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Canada, Malaysia, Dubai, and Australia, as well as international organisa-

tions like the World Bank, IMF, and ADB.

Efforts are underway to track money laundering routes and secure international cooperation to prosecute offenders and recover stolen funds. Authorities face significant challenges, but these initiatives mark a decisive move toward accountability.

What Could Be The Outcome Of Money Laundering?

As a crime investigation and enforcement body, the National Board of Revenue (NBR) maintains

regular contact with organisations for information exchange on such matters. According to the Central Intelligence Cell (CIC), representatives from donor agencies and different countries have pledged to support the repatriation of laundered funds. They have offered assistance, including technical support, training, and establishing operational forensic labs.

CIC is exploring two approaches: repatriating laundered funds and confiscating assets within the country. When asked about confiscating local

assets, a senior CIC official, on condition of anonymity, explained to the Bangla daily Kaler Kantho, "Under tax law, taxpayers must declare any foreign-acquired assets in their income tax returns. These assets are not taxable but must be disclosed. If proven undisclosed, penalties equivalent to the asset's value can be imposed."

The official cited the case of former Land Minister Saifuzzaman Chowdhury, whose significant foreign holdings were uncovered. "As these assets were not declared in tax returns,

discussions are underway to confiscate his local properties to recover the penalty amount," he said. Although repatriating laundered funds is a lengthy process, NBR officials believe it is achievable.

Dr Syed Aminul Karim, a former NBR policymaker and CIC Director General, said, "Although there is no precedent for asset confiscation, the NBR Chairman has the authority to initiate this. It has not been done before, but it doesn't mean it can't be done. Confiscation is the only solution." ■

Third Review Of \$4.7b IMF Loan Package Next Month



A risk of higher budget deficit looms as the government is set to commit to paying off all the accumulated power-sector dues by this fiscal yearend during a third review of the current IMF loan package next month.

Officials say that, in the context of huge payoff of power dues, the current interim government will seek consent from the lender about possible rise

in budget deficit. Clearing up the entire power-sector dues may need a hopping chunk of Tk 450 billion or more during the next seven months.

The debts have ballooned for payment backlog to independent power producers (IPPs), gas companies, public-sector power plants, and Indian public-and private-sector power suppliers including Adani Group. Such spurge of money will

push up the actual budget deficit significantly at the end of this fiscal year, officials believe, breaking the usual trend. A senior finance official said that the government always tries to keep the budget deficit within 5.0 per cent of the gross domestic production (GDP).

In the fiscal year 2023-24, the actual budget shortfall stood at 4.0 per cent. Following payment of a large sum in power-sector arrears may ramp it up to nearly 5.0 per cent of GDP in the current fiscal year. The official said revenue earnings could face a significant shortfall this fiscal year as fallout from the political turmoil surrounding recent changeover. In four months, until October,

the revenue-generation shortfall over the target reached Tk 307 billion, which may further rise in the coming months due to the import duty and tax cuts on various essential items. Moreover, he predicts, the public-sector expenditure may not decrease this fiscal year rather may increase for various reasons following the regime change.

"The gap between income and expenditure, including the payment of the power-sector arrears, may raise actual budget deficit significantly," said the official recently, seeking anonymity. Another finance-division official has said the government may make the payment of arrears both in cash and also by issuing bonds. ■



From 80% to 54% in just over forty years

Action Urged To Address Decline In Women's Share Of Workers In RMG

Business Outlook Report

The proportion of women workers in Bangladesh's ready-made garment (RMG) sector has dropped significantly, raising concerns for the industry's future. According to data from the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), women constituted 80% of the workforce in 1980, but this number declined to 53.7% by 2021. The decrease is most noticeable among workers aged 18 to 35, many of whom leave the industry for alternative professions such as agriculture, domestic work, or tailoring.

Experts attribute this trend to factors like factory unrest, the pursuit of better wages, and a desire for more independence in their work. This issue was highlighted during the presentation of a report titled *Bunon 2030: Key Interventions, Insights, & Way Forward for Bangladesh's RMG Sector* at a discussion event in

Dhaka recently. The session, organized by LightCastle Partners and Policy Exchange Bangladesh, shed light on the implications of the workforce decline and offered recommendations to reverse the trend. Speakers emphasized the importance of creating a safer, women-friendly work environment, ensuring fair and timely wages, and providing better health services. These measures are deemed essential for retaining skilled female workers and maintaining a motivated workforce, which is crucial for the sustainability of the RMG sector.

The event also addressed broader challenges such as decarbonization, automation, and Bangladesh's impending graduation from Least Developed Country (LDC) status. Muhammad Hatem, President of the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA), warned that the loss of trade benefits like the General

System of Preferences (GSP) in 2026 could lead to increased costs and reduced competitiveness. Bangladesh's RMG sector, which generated \$36 billion in exports in the 2023-2024 fiscal year and contributed 10.35% to the GDP, employs over 4 million workers. However, the lack of skilled labor and non-compliance among some manufacturers could hinder growth. The *Bunon 2030* report urged the industry to align with global standards, improve resource efficiency, and prepare for the transition to sustainable practices to ensure long-term growth and resilience.

Stakeholders at the event, including government officials, BGMEA leaders, and industry experts, called for immediate action to address these challenges. They highlighted the need for collaborative efforts to secure the sector's competitiveness and its continued role as a cornerstone of Bangladesh's economy. ■

Low Wages, Production Pressure Hurt Bangladeshi RMG Workers



Business Outlook Report

Low wages and constant pressure to meet production targets have put significant negative impacts, including reliance on overtime, rising debt, health risks and limited access to essential services, on Bangladeshi garment workers, according to a study.

According to the study 'Paying the price for fashion: securing a living wage for Bangladesh's garment workers' published on November 21, despite being a major supplier to the European Union, most workers in the Bangladesh ready-made garment sector earn

insufficient wages to cover basic living costs. The report highlighted how workers' lack of bargaining power, compounded by pressure from global buyers, led to heavy reliance on overtime pay.

Swedwatch, a Sweden-based research organisation, conducted the study in May 2023 across major garment production hubs in Dhaka, Ashulia and Tongi, in collaboration with the Awaj Foundation, an organisation dedicated to advocating for workers' rights in the garment sector. After China, Bangladesh is the second-largest supplier of textiles and clothing to

Sweden, with imports valued at approximately 8.8 billion SEK in 2022. The report observed that the recent increase in Bangladesh's RMG sector minimum wage — from Tk 8,000 to Tk 12,500 a month — still fell short, leaving workers with only 38 per cent of what would be considered a living wage.

This amount is also well below the Tk 23,000 demanded by workers, unions and international organisations, including those affiliated with IndustriALL Global Union Bangladesh. As a result, many workers struggle to afford essential needs such as food, housing, healthcare and

education for their children, which perpetuates cycles of debt and exploitation, the report said. It also said that long working hours and excessive overtime remained a major issue, with factory owners often imposing 12–16-hour shifts seven days a week, due to pressure from global buyers to meet production targets and unreasonable deadlines.

According to the report, workers in Bangladesh's garment sector have limited options and are often forced to accept excessive overtime. A decreasing proportion of their basic salary has left many reliant on overtime pay, with refusal to work

extra hours sometimes resulting in punishment, the report mentioned. It said that this situation severely impacted workers' well-being, with many reporting stress-related illnesses, depression and fatigue. The minimum wage structure in Bangladesh included various elements such as a basic salary along with allowances for health, housing, transport and food.

However, the basic salary percentage is particularly important for workers, as it determines not only overtime pay but also bonuses, annual pay rises, and other benefits, including maternity payments. Over time, the reduction in the basic salary percent-

age has forced workers to depend on overtime for income, while the overall value of their basic salary has continued to decline. The basic pay for garment workers in Bangladesh has declined by 14 percentage points, now making up only 53.6 per cent of the total minimum monthly wage of Tk 12,500 set in 2023.

In comparison, basic pay accounted for 67.67 per cent of the minimum wage of Tk 1,663 in 2006, according to the report. Garment workers in Bangladesh remain trapped in an exploitative system that leaves them unable to meet their basic needs, the report said. Despite decades of activism and corporate

commitments, a living wage – a fundamental human right – continued to elude these workers, it mentioned. Sofia Käll, programme officer at Swedwatch, who conducted research in Bangladesh, said 'With global brands sourcing garments from Bangladesh facing stricter human rights requirements, they have no excuse but to take immediate and decisive action to improve workers' access to living wages.'

The report recommended that global brands strengthen their due diligence efforts by meaningfully engaging with garment workers, unions and non-governmental organisations to address

negative impacts. It urged the brands to adopt responsible purchasing practices to prevent wage suppression, ensure worker well-being, promote supply-chain transparency and provide accessible grievance mechanisms.

The report also stressed the importance of continuous engagement to support suppliers and ensure living wages. Swedwatch called on the EU member states and the global brands to fully leverage the potential of the corporate sustainability due diligence directive by guaranteeing fair wages and safe working conditions. ■

Businesses Scale Back As Confidence Wanes



Economic uncertainty has gripped almost every industrial sector in the country, as a crisis of confidence among businessmen continues to grow. Declines in the import of industrial raw materials and capital machinery, coupled with persistent gas and electricity shortages, are stifling growth. A surge in labour unrest across various industries following the

recent political transition has only deepened the crisis, leaving industries and investors in a state of apprehension. On 5 August, the fascist Awami League government fell in the face of a student-led mass uprising. An interim government led by Prof Muhammad Yunus is now in charge of the country, but the law and order situation remains unstable.

Since the new government assumed office, labour movements have disrupted production in factories. Various groups have been regularly protesting in Dhaka with differing demands. Political uncertainty persists.

Business leaders note that in such conditions, investment tends to diminish. According to data from Bangladesh Bank, during the first three months (July–September) of the current financial year 2024–25, the opening and settlement of letters of credit (LCs) for capital machinery imports dropped by 40.80% and 24.89% respectively. Businesspeople and economists are urging the

government to prioritise keeping factories, businesses, and trade running smoothly. However, they also highlight the lack of meaningful dialogue and initiative between the interim government and the business community to address these challenges. As a result, business leaders are apprehensive about the future.

A sense of fear pervades everywhere, leading entrepreneurs to scale back on the import of capital machinery. Similarly, the import of industrial raw materials has declined, hindering the launch of new industrial projects and the expansion of businesses. ■

Trump Names China Hawk Howard Lutnick As US Commerce Secretary



Business Outlook Report

US President-elect Donald Trump nominated Howard Lutnick, the co-chair of his transition team, as his commerce secretary on November 19 -- a choice set to bring a tougher stance on China from the incoming administration.

Lutnick will also lead the country's tariff and trade agenda, with "additional direct responsibility for the Office of the United States Trade Representative," Trump said in a statement.

Tariffs are a key part of Trump's economic agenda and he has promised sweeping duties on all imports when he returns to the White House.

Lutnick is chief executive of financial services firm Cantor Fitzgerald and a Trump ally originally tipped as a front-runner for treasury secretary.

But he was instead named to helm Commerce, a smaller department that works to boost American industry and has a key role in policy to shore up the US semiconductor sector and reduce reliance on Asia.

Under President Joe Biden, the Commerce Department stepped up export controls on critical technologies like quantum computing and semiconductor manufacturing goods, taking aim at access by adversaries like Beijing. Trump's administration could harden this stance.

Lutnick has expressed support for a tariff level of 60 percent on Chinese goods alongside a 10 percent tariff on all other imports. Both are among proposals that Trump has floated, with the Republican taking aim at countries which have been "ripping us off for years."

In Trump's first term he engaged in a tariffs war with China, with the US Trade Representative's office issuing duties on imports from the world's second-biggest economy.

Lutnick also previously lamented the loss of manufacturing jobs in the United States and offshoring to China. "I'm all in with Donald Trump," Lutnick told podcaster Anthony Pompliano last month.

In the same interview, he slammed electric cars as "coastal elite

nonsense" and blamed China for being the source of fentanyl in the United States.

The deadly drug, many times more powerful than heroin, is responsible for tens of thousands of overdose deaths a year. "China is attacking America from its guts," he charged.

Lutnick was initially tipped to head the Treasury Department but a tussle over the position spilled into the public eye last weekend.

Trump's health secretary pick Robert F. Kennedy Jr. expressed support for Lutnick, saying on social media that "Bitcoin will have no stronger advocate" than him.

The world's richest man Elon Musk also threw his support behind Lutnick for Treasury chief while calling the other top contender, hedge fund manager Scott Bessent, "a business-as-usual choice."

"Business-as-usual is driving America bankrupt, so we need change one way or another," said Musk, who Trump has tapped to lead a new Department of Government Efficiency.

Lutnick recalls losing hundreds of employees in the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center, a tragedy narrowly he avoided as he was taking his son to school.

Besides Cantor Fitzgerald, Lutnick heads financial technology firm BGC Group and real estate services firm Newmark Group.

He graduated from Haverford College and has a degree in economics, according to his biography on Cantor's website.

As co-chair of Trump's transition team, Lutnick has been identifying new hires for the president-elect's administration. ■

WEEKLY SELECTED ECONOMIC INDICATORS

Chief Economist's Unit
(Policy Support Wing)
28 November 2024

	27 November 2023	30 June 2024	31 October 2024 ^R	27 November 2024
1. Foreign Exchange Reserve (in million US\$)	25162.78	26714.20	25500.80	24456.21
	19514.71	21686.3(BPM6)	19844.00 (BPM6)	18735.97 (BPM6)
2. Interbank Taka-USD Exchange Rate (average)	27 November 2023	30 June 2024	31 October 2024	27 November 2024
	110.5000	118.0000	120.0000	120.0000
3. Overnight Call Money Rate	27 November 2023	30 June 2024	31 October 2024	27 November 2024
Weighted Average Rate (in Percent)	8.36	9.01	9.91	10.00
Broad/Overall Share Price Index	27 November 2023	30 June 2024	27 November 2024	Percentage change
				27 Nov 24 over Jun 24
a) Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE)	6209.44	5328.40	5197.94	-2.45
b) Chittagong Stock Exchange (CSE)	18422.55	15066.82	14469.49	-3.96
	October, 2023	July-October, FY24	October, 2024 ^P	July-October, FY25 ^P
5. a) Wage Earners' Remittances (in million US\$)	1971.43	6878.38	2395.08	8937.11
b) Annual Percentage Change	29.23	-4.45	21.49	29.93
	September, 2023	July-September FY24	September, 2024 ^P	July-September FY25 ^P
6. a) Import (c&f) (in million US\$)	5277.20	15909.40	5651.30	16170.60
b) Annual Percentage Change			7.09	1.64
	September, 2023	July-September FY24	September, 2024 ^P	July-September FY25 ^P
7. a) Import (f.o.b) (in million US\$)	5031.00	15061.00	5275.00	15190.00
b) Annual Percentage Change			4.85	0.86
	September, 2023	July-September FY24	September, 2024 ^P	July-September FY25 ^P
8. a) Export (f.o.b) (in million US\$)	3065.00	10051.00	3400.00	10560.00
b) Annual Percentage Change			10.93	5.06
	September, 2023	July-September FY24	September, 2024 ^P	July-September FY25 ^P
8. Current Account Balance (in million US\$)	-1829.0	July-September FY24	July-September FY25 ^P	FY24 ^P
	September, 2023	July-September, FY24	September, 2024 ^P	July-September, FY25 ^P
9. a) Tax Revenue (NBR) (BDT in crore)	28426.93	75487.70	29002.68	70902.90
b) Annual Percentage Change	5.94	12.45	2.03	-6.07
	September, 2023	July-September FY24	September 2024 ^P	July-September FY25 ^P
10. Investment in National Savings Certificates (BDT in crore)	September, 2023	July-September FY24	September 2024 ^P	July-September FY25 ^P
a) Net Sale	-147.85	-1264.97	4109.09	8332.80
b) Total Outstanding	366128.48	366128.48	354601.85	354601.85
	September, 2023	June, 2024 ^R	September, 2024 ^P	Percentage change
				Sept.'24 over Sept.'23
11. a) Reserve Money (RM) (BDT in crore)	344233.90	413647.00	375273.20	Sept.'24 over Jun'24
b) Broad Money (M2) (BDT in crore)	1877245.90	2033234.00	2025148.80	Sept.'23 over Jun'23
				Jun'24 over Jun'23
				Jun'24 over Jun'23

	Percentage change											
	July-October FY24				July-October FY25 ^P				July-October FY25 over July-October FY24			
	Opening	Settlement	Opening	Settlement	Opening	Settlement	Opening	Settlement	Opening	Settlement	Opening	Settlement
Total Domestic Credit (BDT in crore)	1930570.80	2115524.90	2106299.90	9.10	-0.44	0.20	9.80					
a) Net Credit to the Govt. Sector	370921.00	424877.10	406813.80	9.68	-4.25	-4.24	9.69					
b) Credit to the Other Public Sector	46595.90	49419.10	47242.00	1.39	-4.41	3.17	9.42					
c) Credit to the Private Sector	1513053.90	1641228.70	1652244.10	9.20	0.67	1.26	9.84					
L/C Opening and Settlement (in million US\$)												
a) Consumer Goods	1966.42	2171.17	1882.67	-2.15	-13.29	-13.56						
b) Capital Machinery	866.42	850.04	689.56	-32.79	-18.88	-23.86						
c) Intermediate Goods	1521.97	1800.33	1548.53	-12.50	-13.99	-12.00						
d) Petroleum	3532.66	3326.64	3376.17	-16.11	1.49	-5.02						
e) Industrial Raw Materials	7534.79	6983.41	7615.36	4.47	9.05	-15.90						
f) Others	7180.80	7128.91	7475.12	6.60	4.86	5.80						
Total	22603.06	22260.50	22587.41	-1.22	1.47	-8.29						
Rate of Inflation on the basis of Consumer Price Index for National (Base:2021-22=100)	February, 2024	March, 2024	April, 2024	June, 2024	July, 2024	August, 2024	September, 2024	October, 2024				
a) Twelve Month Average Basis	9.66	9.69	9.73	9.73	9.90	9.95	9.97	10.05				
b) Point to Point Basis	9.67	9.81	9.74	9.72	11.66	10.49	9.92	10.87				
Corresponding Period	February, 2023 ¹	March, 2023 ⁺	April, 2023	June, 2023	July, 2023	August, 2023	September, 2023	October, 2023				
a) Twelve Month Average Basis	8.14	8.39	8.64	9.02	9.90	9.24	9.29	9.37				
b) Point to Point Basis	8.78	9.33	9.24	9.74	9.69	9.92	9.63	9.93				
Classified Loan	September, 2022	December, 2022	March, 2023	June, 2023	December, 2023	March, 2024	June, 2024	September, 2024				
a) % of Classified Loan to Total Outstanding	9.36	8.16	8.80	10.11	9.00	11.11	12.56	16.93				
b) % of Net Classified Loan to Net Outstanding	0.90	-0.08	0.30	1.58	0.59	2.44	3.68	5.89				
Agricultural and Non-farm Rural Credit (BDT in crore)	August, 23	September, 23	July-September, FY24	August, 24	July-Sep, FY25 ^P	FY24 ^P	FY23	FY22				
a) Disbursement **	3316.99	3516.38	8824.64	2080.20	6458.18	37153.90	32829.89	28834.21				
b) Recovery	2540.26	2763.73	8014.31	2911.67	9209.97	35571.62	33010.09	27463.41				
c) Outstanding	53230.38	54164.17	54164.17	55822.75	54927.74	58119.59	52704.45	49802.28				
SME Loan (BDT in crore)	Oct.-Dec, FY23	Jan.-Mar, FY23	Apr.-Jun, FY23 ^P	Jul.-Sept, FY24 ^P	Jan.-Mar, FY24 ^P	Apr.-June, FY24 ^P	FY24	FY23				
a) Disbursement	60611.61	49068.40	62747.05	52654.90	53107.48	54526.41	225130.78	224103.87				
b) Outstanding	282896.54	283236.32	295842.02	298339.27	303970.10	306119.87	306119.87	295842.02				
Industrial Term Loan (BDT in crore)	Oct.-Dec, FY23	Jan.-Mar, FY23 ^P	Apr.-Jun, FY23 ^P	Jul.-Sept, FY24 ^P	Jan.-Mar, FY24 ^P	Apr.-June, FY24 ^P	FY24	FY23				
a) Disbursement	29574.55	20907.66	26127.36	26194.00	22015.37	24971.83	106944.42	95172.03				
b) Recovery	50593.69	17899.35	17290.02	22712.86	23468.00	25345.17	96588.96	106393.23				
c) Outstanding	360051.14	383075.76	395317.82	399693.22	428079.27	442485.79	442485.79	395317.82				
GDP Growth Rate (Base: 2015-16)	FY16	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY22	FY23 ^R	FY24 ^P				
	7.27	6.59	7.32	7.88	3.45	7.10	5.78	5.82				

Step Footwear Establishes A New Benchmark for Comfortable, Stylish School Shoes



Business Outlook Report

Step Footwear has achieved a new milestone in the Bangladesh market for school shoes. Crafted with advanced technology and innovative design, these shoes offer a perfect combination of comfort and durability, making them a preferred choice among parents and students alike. Designed with comfort for daily use in mind, they surpass traditional standards, redefining expectations for school footwear.

In Bangladesh, this shoe is recognized as the lightest school shoe available, distinguishing it from other brands in the market. Its standout feature is its feather-light weight, which makes daily activities easier and more comfortable for students. This shoe, particu-

larly suited for students of all ages, has quickly become a top choice for parents. It has gained popularity not only in big cities but also among students in small towns and rural areas across the country.

Specially designed for students' daily use, these shoes not only provide exceptional comfort but also ensure durability through the use of sustainable and high-quality materials. Step Footwear has incorporated capsule eyelets, a feature typically found in premium footwear worldwide. These capsule eyelets not only enhance the style and appeal of the shoes but also reinforce the lace area to withstand additional pressure, preventing it from tearing and boosting overall durability. The Velcro fastening system used in Step Footwear shoes

provides a simple, quick, and user-friendly closure, making it extremely convenient to use. It eliminates the hassle of tying laces, making it popular for everyday wear, especially among younger children, who can easily and safely put on and take off their shoes comfortably at any time without assistance.

These shoes are easy to wash and quick to dry- notably convenient for white shoes, as they can be cleaned effortlessly after daily school use. Step Footwear ensures the right fit, allowing users to enjoy immediate comfort and convenience. Flexibility is essential for a child's active daily lifestyle. To support running, playing, various activities, children need shoes that are not only durable but also resistant to wear even after prolonged

use. Step Footwear is committed to providing consumers with the best possible experience. Its primary goal is to create a shoe that is lightweight, moisture-resistant, and designed for maximum comfort and safety for school students. To ensure long-lasting quality, Step Footwear uses rubberized EVA compound materials, combining comfort with exceptional durability in every pair.

The anti-slip sole in these uniquely designed shoes ensures safety for students across various environments, offering secure and comfortable movement, specifically in rainy or wet conditions. Made from eco-friendly and durable materials, these shoes minimize environmental impact while promoting students' health. Each pair is crafted from carefully inspected materials, ensuring lasting protection and a comfortable experience for long-term use.

Step Footwear's school shoes are widely available and affordable throughout Bangladesh. The company believes that every student deserves comfortable and durable footwear, and is committed to fulfilling this promise continuously. Currently, Step Footwear is offering an attractive, comfortable, and durable pair of socks free of cost with every purchase of their school shoes, making this a truly enviable offer. ■

Energy Business Opening Up For Resolving Fuel Crisis



Industrial Production Stagnating For Gas Shortage, Businesses Decry

Business Outlook Report

Energy business is opening up for crisis resolution, the adviser concerned said as businesses urged the interim government to ensure reliable quality gas supply to industries forthwith for uninterrupted manufacturing operations.

They lamented that industrial growth had either stagnated or declined in recent years, as evidenced by the downtrend in energy consumption within the sector over the past two to three years because of past mismanagement and 'theft' in the sector. As a result, industries are losing their capacity to generate employment,

which is adversely impacting overall economic growth. Nothing that the ongoing national reforms may take time, leading businesspeople at a meet with government functionaries stressed that addressing challenges in the industrial sector cannot wait and requires immediate attention. They urged the government to stop 'theft' in the gas -transmission system and mete out exemplary punishment to the offenders immediately.

The speakers came up with the observations at a seminar titled 'Ways of Mitigating Energy Crisis in the Industrial Sectors', organised by Bangladesh Chamber of Industries (BCI) in a city hotel on

November 23. Speaking as the chief guest, Energy Adviser Muhammad Fouzul Kabir Khan said real solution for energy crisis lies in going for inexhaustible renewable energy. He said the government is going to advertise this week for 40 renewable-energy plants. The adviser mentions that people cite lack of land as an obstacle to setting up renewable -energy plant which is "entirely untrue".

He disclosed before the business audience that the government has planned to issue an open tender in December to bring the recently discovered gas resource in Bhola to Dhaka. "Interested businesses can

participate in the tender and bring the Bhola gas to Dhaka in the form of compressed natural gas [CNG] or liquefied natural gas [LNG]," the adviser extended the offer of the post-uprising government to private businesses. Mr Fouzul Kabir said although 70MMCF gas had been found in Bhola, it could not be brought to Dhaka or industrial areas for lack of a pipeline. "Bringing Bhola's gas to Dhaka will somewhat alleviate the gas shortage in industries," he added. He points out that key problems in the country's economy are lack of competitiveness and waste in the public-procurement process.

"Usually, if you want to do business in the public sector, you have to know the minister, high officials," he told the business meet, adding that the current government has taken plan to open public-procurement process in the most possible way to ensure competitiveness and transparency. Mr Khan said he removed anti-competitive conditions for opening up businesses. "We have saved Tk 3.7 billion from import of six months' fuel by removing a clause, we also reviewed the list of LNG importers," he said about the reforms being undertaking in this sector, as part of national reform recipe. He urged businesses to utilize these opportunities of opening up to do business in the public-procurement sector. "If good businesses do not come forward to do business, bad businesses will drive away good businesses like in previous days," he said.

He notes that business with good relations with the government, which is part of 'crony capitalism', is not sustainable, and ultimately these types of businesses collapse. Echoing the energy adviser's views, Commerce Adviser of the interim government Sheikh Bashir Uddin made a call for businesses to use renewable energy. He also urged the businesses to make partnership with the government to solve gas crisis,

whether setting up pipelines in individual initiative or setting up renewable-energy plant. He said cost of solar is probably the lowest today. The businessman-turned government functionary, terms gas-connection guidelines in the country a 'bond of slavery'. Mr Uddin said during the Awami League government's tenure, he had to pay Tk200 million for road cutting alone to build a 40-kilometre pipeline at his own expense for supplying gas to his industrial plant.

"I even had to pay bribes to pay that Tk200 million," said Bashir, who is the former CEO of Akij Bashir Group. He urged the businesses that

in FY 2023-24 and a mere 3.98 per cent in the April-June quarter. He said private-sector credit growth dwindled, FDI dropped 15 per cent to \$300 million in July-September 2024, and export earnings fell from \$43.36 billion in FY 2022-23 to \$40.81 billion in FY 2023-24. "Rising costs are exacerbating the crisis: gas prices have surged 286.5 per cent over five years, while electricity, diesel, and transport costs have risen by 33.5 per cent, 68 per cent, and 50 per cent, respectively."

He said 200 factories had already been shut and 300 more factories were on the way to shut. He said the combined effect of these challenges



now they do not need to pay bribe and should take the opportunity to lay the pipelines at own cost to make gas available to their factories. He also said the power sector is corruption-prone, made by design to make businesses subordinate. The commerce adviser also said, "I have heard the energy adviser [Fouzul] say at a meeting that the energy sector is a pillar of criminalisation and corruption. We have to get out of it."

BCI President Anwarul Alam Parvez said Bangladesh's industrial sector is facing a sharp slowdown, with growth falling from 10.29 per cent in FY 2020-21 to just 6.66 per cent

is eroding profitability, stifling investment, and threatening the sector's role as a driver of economic growth. "Without decisive intervention, Bangladesh's industrial momentum risks grinding to a halt," he said. Leathergoods and Footwear Manufacturers & Exporters Association of Bangladesh (LFMEAB) President Syed Nasim Manzur said job creation is the single-biggest problem in every economy in the world, including Bangladesh.

He said Bangladesh only can create job from industrialization. "But, at this moment, the industries are shredding jobs, not creating jobs," he told the meet. He said Indian

textile industry creates 45 million jobs and BPO and IT sector creates 5.4 millions, leading the world. He said industrial hubs in Narayanganj,

on 9 December. "We hope to sign an agreement with a world-renowned fuel company for offshore gas early next year." He further said

power and energy sectors is urgently required," he said. Professor of BUET Ijaz Hossain presented the keynote at the seminar. He placed a



Savar, Ashulia, Gazipur have been suffering from energy crisis. He called for not using system loss by sugarcoating the theft of industrial gas.

"Theft has to be stopped from tomorrow and we want to see some exemplary punishment for the offence," he said. He also stressed the need of continuation of using coal in the power plants. Noted businessman Abdul Awal Minto alleged that statistical data in the country are fact-based. "The data need to be amended for proper planning," he said.

Speaking at the event, Bangladesh Oil, Gas and Mineral Corporation (Petrobangla) Chairman Zanendra Nath Sarker said an offshore-bidding tender will also be opened

there is a huge potential for gas discovery in various parts of the country, including the hilly areas. Preparations are underway to open an onshore bidding to explore gas in these areas.

Zanendra expressed hope that onshore bidding could be conducted by next March. Noted businessman Mir Nasir Hossain said power sector was the centre of criminalization in the country during previous government. "All the oligarchs have been created from this sector," he said. Former FBCCI President Abul Kalam Azad said many factories are on the way to relocating from China due to tax imposition by the Trump government.

"Bangladesh needs to accommodate them and policy reform in the

set of recommendations, including adoption of a gas- utilization policy that aligns with current realities, while ensuring long-term reliability and sustainability.

To address immediate challenges, he emphasized the need for uninterrupted power supply to feeders serving predominantly industrial customers.

He also called for enhanced gas supply to industrial zones, proposing a comprehensive pipeline- network analysis to prioritize these areas. ■

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