City Polls to Street Politics: What Lies Ahead?

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Business Outlook

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Business Outlook

From the Editor

New Pay Scale: Mind the Wider Economic Impact

The government's decision to introduce the new pay scale for public employees is understandable after more than a decade without a major revision. Yet, given Bangladesh's present economic conditions, the timing and financing of such a large wage increase warrant serious scrutiny.

The new pay structure, approved in August, will be implemented in four phases from July 2026 to January 2028. It will raise basic salaries substantially, with the additional annual expenditure estimated at Tk1,05,580 crore. The government has opted for a phased approach precisely because of concerns over fiscal pressure and inflation.

The concern, however, goes beyond the welfare of public servants. Inflation remains high at 8.26 percent, while private-sector credit growth fell to a historic low of 4.47 percent in June and remained below 5 percent for a fifth consecutive month in July. These figures point to weak investment, subdued business activity and limited prospects for employment generation.

A substantial increase in public-sector wages can boost consumption and improve the living standards of government employees. But if the additional expenditure is financed through excessive domestic borrowing or monetary expansion, the wider economy could face renewed inflationary pressure. Government borrowing from banks has already exceeded the FY2025-26 target by Tk47,538 crore, raising concerns about crowding out private investment.

The government therefore needs to look beyond the immediate benefits to its employees and carefully assess the wider spillover effects. Higher public wages should not come at the expense of private investment, employment, price stability or the purchasing power of millions of workers outside the public sector.

A pay revision after 11 years is difficult to avoid, particularly when living costs have risen sharply. But implementation must be accompanied by stronger revenue mobilisation, expenditure rationalisation and measures to protect private-sector investment. The government should also consider policies to improve wages and social protection for workers in the broader economy.

The new pay scale should ultimately strengthen economic stability—not deepen the hardship of the majority. Its success will depend not simply on how much salaries rise, but on how responsibly the resulting fiscal and inflationary pressures are managed. ■

(Sikder Md Sadrul Hasan)
s69hasan@yahoo.com

Editor & Publisher
Sikder Md Sadrul Hasan

Managing Editor
Afroja Bilkis

News Team
Siddique Islam,
Salahuddin A. Bablu,
Masum Billah,
Saadman Sajjad,
Kayes M Sohel,
Ashraful Islam,
Jasim Uddin Khan
and Fahad Ferdows.

Staff Correspondent
Shahed Farid

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Waliul Alam

UK Correspondent
Nurul Akbar Bhuiyan

Photo Department
Sheikh Mamun

Cartoonist
Syed Rashad Imam (Tanmoy)

IT and Graphic Design
Tonmoy Rajbongshi

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Editorial
Flat-A3, House-27, Road-6,
Block-D, Niketan, Dhaka-1212.

News & Commercial Office
Flat-6A, House-49, Road-11,
Niketan, Dhaka-1212

Telephone : 01819 200 641, 01627 140 427
Email : bdbusinessoutlook@gmail.com

Website
www.businessoutlookbd.com

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2 Lakh Tonnes Of Potatoes To Be Exported To Russia Next Year

Bangladesh is expected to export around 2 lakh tonnes of potatoes to Russia next year, Agriculture Minister Dr Md Abdur Razzaque has said. A memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between the two countries in this regard at the capital's Hotel Intercontinental on April 4. Abdullah Sajjad, chairman of Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation and Abdus Sattar Mia, chairman of National Group, signed the agreement on behalf of the respective countries. Agriculture Minister Dr Md Abdur Razzak, Agriculture Secretary Wahida Akhter, Executive Chairman of BARC Sheikh Md Bakhtiar, Russian Ambassador to Bangladesh Alexander Mantitsky, member director of BADC Mostafizur Rahman were also present at the signing ceremony. The minister said currently more than one crore tonnes of potatoes are being produced in Bangladesh annually. "Our annual

demand is 80 lakh tonnes, the remaining 20 lakh tonnes can be exported, and the government is working on this," he added. In March 2022, Russia lifted its restrictions and resumed the import of potatoes from the entire territory of Bangladesh as the government has taken various measures to free the vegetable from brown rot disease and make it safe. ■

Oil prices surge 6% on continued Mideast tanker attacks

Oil prices jumped more than 6% September 10, with both major benchmarks trading at over $100 a barrel as the biggest spike in attacks on shipping since the Iran war began fed worries among traders about further disruptions to already tight supplies, reports Reuters.

Brent crude futures settled up $6.42, or 6.34%, at $107.63 a barrel. US oil topped $100 a barrel for the first time since May as West Texas Intermediate crude futures rose $6.43, or 6.69%, to $102.48. Both benchmarks hit their highest since 19 May and recorded their steepest increases in nearly two months. Iran-aligned Houthis seized control of Yemen's port of Mocha on September 10, posing a further threat to Red Sea traffic, while Gulf traffic remains restricted through the Strait of Hormuz as tanker attacks in the region have intensified in recent days. ■

World avoids worst of energy shock, but risks remain high: IMF

The IMF said on September 10 that the global economy had weathered the energy shock caused by the war in the Middle East better than feared and global economic output was still expected to expand by about 3% in 2026, but it cautioned that risks remained high, reports Reuters. Julie Kozack, spokesperson for the International Monetary Fund, said oil and gas prices remained elevated and the energy shock from the war was not over. Global debt pressures were also mounting and the disinflation process over the 2022 cost-of-living crisis had stalled. Global inflationary expectations have risen but remain well-anchored over the longer run, Kozack told a regular IMF briefing. "So far, despite six months of war in the Middle East, the global economy has been resilient," Kozack said, adding that the use of oil and gas reserves had allowed some countries to cope with energy shocks caused by the war. ■

Bangladesh, Hong Kong sign investment protection agreement

Bangladesh and Hong Kong signed an Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (IPPA) on September 9 to strengthen bilateral investment flows and provide greater protection for investors from both sides. The agreement was signed during the opening session of the 11th "Belt and Road Summit 2026" in Hong Kong. Industries, Commerce and Textiles and Jute Minister Khandakar Abdul Muktadir signed the agreement on behalf of Bangladesh, while Hong Kong Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development Algernon Yau signed for the Hong Kong government. The agreement is expected to strengthen protection for investments and capital from both sides, while helping create a more institutionalised investment environment and new opportunities for economic cooperation. ■

Low-cost smartphones likely to hit market in October

Low-cost smartphones are expected to hit the Bangladeshi market in October as the government works with local manufacturers and mobile operators to bring around 50 million feature-phone users into the digital space. The initiative, pushed and led by Adviser to the Prime Minister for ICT, Telecom, Science and Technology Rehan Asif Asad, involves developing affordable hybrid smartphones combining with physical buttons, alongside discussions on operator subsidies and targeted support from the BTRC's Social Obligation Fund (SOF) for people from low-income households. The government is working with local mobile-phone manufacturers to reduce the cost of production through tax incentives, cheaper components and changes in handset design. People involved in the process said the basic production cost of a hybrid smartphone could be around US$ 55. ■

President seeks dialogue to resolve Indo-Bangla issues

President Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir has stressed the need for resolving outstanding issues between Bangladesh and India through dialogue and urged India to take effective measures for the equitable sharing of waters of common rivers, including the Ganges and the Teesta, reports UNB. Mutual trust and confidence between the peoples of the two countries would increase further if issues of common interest are resolved through just and mutually acceptable solutions, he said. The president made the remarks when Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Dinesh Trivedi paid a courtesy call on him at Bangabhaban on September 8, said President's press secretary Md Sarwar Alam. Noting that the management of common rivers is directly linked to the lives and livelihoods of the people of both countries, he urged India to take effective measures

for the fair distribution of waters of common rivers. Dinesh Trivedi informed the President that his government is taking positive steps in this regard. The Indian High Commissioner expressed the hope that the two countries would continue to work together and sought the President's cooperation in discharging his responsibilities. ■

City Polls to Street Politics: What Lies Ahead?

SMS Hasan

Bangladesh is entering a politically sensitive period as the government faces mounting pressure from the Jamaat-e-Islami-led 11-party opposition alliance, growing public concerns over law and order, and continuing economic and energy challenges. The opposition has intensified its programmes, including long marches and rallies, seeking to put the government under greater political pressure. The alliance has said its programmes are aimed at forcing the government to respond to what it describes as public demands and governance failures.

At the same time, the government appears determined to maintain a firm position ahead of the forthcoming local government elections. A major test will be whether these elections can be conducted in a manner that is broadly regarded as competitive, peaceful and credible. The government has also made clear that the Awami League, whose political activities remain banned, will not be allowed to participate in elections unless the ban is lifted.

The situation is further complicated by attempts by supporters of the banned Awami League to return to the streets. Reports of gatherings and attempted processions have been followed by arrests, adding another layer of tension to an already polarised political environment. How the authorities handle such incidents will be closely watched, particularly in terms of maintaining public order while ensuring that law-enforcement actions remain within the legal framework.

Law and order is another important challenge for the government. Although Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed has said that police data indicate an overall improvement in the situation, incidents of murder, abduction and other serious crimes continue to generate public anxiety. Even isolated high-profile crimes can have a disproportionate impact on public confidence, especially when citizens feel that their personal security is at risk.

The energy situation has also affected the government's public standing. Bangladesh experienced

severe gas and electricity shortages in August and early September, disrupting households and industries. The government has since taken measures to restore gas supplies and address power shortages, while acknowledging the difficulties faced by consumers. Yet the underlying problem remains structural: Bangladesh relies heavily on imported LNG, making the economy vulnerable to international supply disruptions and price volatility.

Meanwhile, dissatisfaction can also emerge when members and supporters of the ruling party are perceived as behaving aggressively or acting beyond public expectations. For a relatively new government, maintaining discipline among its political ranks is therefore as important as delivering administrative results.

Diplomatically, Prime Minister Tarique Rahman's decision not to attend the BRICS Summit in New

Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Dr Shafiqur Rahman speaks during an exchange of views with journalists at Bogra Circuit House on September 12

Delhi has generated discussion about Bangladesh-India relations. Dhaka said Rahman had not been invited in his capacity as Bangladesh's prime minister but as chair of BIMSTEC. The government indicated that a bilateral visit could take place when conditions are conducive and mutual respect is maintained.

Taken together, these developments point to a period in which political management, public security, economic stability and diplomacy are closely interconnected. The forthcoming local government elections could become particularly significant. If they are conducted peacefully and credibly, they could strengthen confidence in the electoral process and provide the government with an opportunity to demonstrate institutional effectiveness. Conversely, controversy surrounding the polls could deepen political confrontation. For the government, therefore, managing the political environment while delivering visible improvements in everyday life may prove crucial to sustaining public confidence.

The latest development is Jamaat-e-Islami's decision to field Mohammad Selim Uddin for Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) and Dhaka University Central Students' Union (Ducsu) Vice President Shadik Kayem for Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC). Jamaat Secretary General Mia Golam Porwar has said the party has been preparing candidates for local government elections across the country and that its organisational process for the two Dhaka city corporations has already selected the candidates. The move is significant

because the Dhaka city elections are likely to become an important test of the relative organisational strength and public appeal of the major political forces after the dramatic political changes of the past two years.

Jamaat is simultaneously attempting to consolidate its position as the principal opposition force through street mobilisation. Its 11-party alliance has already held a Dhaka-Chattogram long march and announced further programmes, including the Dhaka-Rangpur march on September 19, followed by programmes towards Khulna and Sylhet and a grand rally in Dhaka. The alliance says the programmes are intended to press demands concerning the referendum verdict, justice for the July killings, law and order, energy and fertiliser shortages, commodity prices, corruption and extortion.

The BNP government, however, interprets the continuing street campaign differently. Its leaders argue that an elected government that has been in office for only about six months needs time to address longstanding economic and administrative problems and that sustained street pressure risks creating instability.

This disagreement exposes a larger question: what should opposition politics look like in the new political environment?

City polls become the next political arena

Jamaat's selection of candidates for DNCC and DSCC suggests that the party is not relying solely on street politics. It is preparing to compete through formal electoral institutions as well.

Selim Uddin, the ameer of Jamaat's Dhaka North city unit, has been selected for DNCC, while Shadik Kayem, whose full name is Md Abu Shadik Kayem, has been selected for DSCC. Kayem became widely known through the student movement and was later elected Ducsu vice president in the September 2025 election.

Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed addressing in Jatiya Sangsad

The choices are politically meaningful because the two candidates represent different elements of Jamaat's organisational structure. Selim Uddin brings experience from the party's city-level organisation, while Kayem represents the younger political generation that emerged prominently from the post-July political environment.

The National Citizen Party (NCP) has also already announced candidates for the two corporations, choosing Chief Coordinator Nasiruddin Patwary for DSCC and spokesperson Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuyain for DNCC.

The BNP, meanwhile, has yet to announce its candidates.

The emerging three-way competition could therefore make the Dhaka city elections more than a routine local-government contest. They may become an early electoral test of how the BNP government, Jamaat and the NCP perform when competing directly for urban voters.

Dhaka is particularly important because the two city corporations encompass a large and politically diverse population. Campaigns there are likely to focus not only on national ideology but also on issues directly affecting everyday life: traffic congestion, waste management, drainage, public transport, waterlogging, roads, pollution and municipal services.

The results, therefore, could provide political parties with valuable information about their organisational reach and voter appeal after the national political transition.

From street mobilisation to electoral competition

Jamaat's strategy appears to have two interconnected dimensions: pressure through street politics and consolidation through elections.

The alliance has presented its long marches as issue-based programmes. Its leaders say the government must respond to public suffering, particularly shortages of electricity, fuel and fertiliser, rising commodity prices, weak law and order and corruption. The alliance has also made implementation of

the referendum verdict and justice for the July killings central demands. The programme was subsequently expanded from six to seven demands.

The first major long march, from Dhaka to Chattogram on September 5, was presented by Jamaat leaders as a campaign for people's rights. The alliance had earlier said it would attempt to minimise disruption to ordinary traffic during the road programmes.

From Jamaat's perspective, the marches serve a dual purpose. They demonstrate organisational capacity while keeping pressure on the government between elections. They also provide an opportunity to frame the opposition as a movement representing public grievances rather than simply a collection of political parties.

But the BNP sees the strategy through a different lens.

BNP leaders argue that parliament remains the appropriate institution for raising policy demands and holding the government accountable. They question why an opposition alliance would rely heavily on prolonged street programmes when an elected government is functioning and parliament is active.

This is not simply a disagreement over tactics. It reflects competing concepts of democratic politics.

For the BNP, democratic opposition should involve parliamentary scrutiny, public criticism, policy proposals and institutional accountability, supplemented when necessary by peaceful political programmes.

For Jamaat and its allies, however, street mobilisation is itself a legitimate mechanism for forcing a government to respond to public grievances. The alliance has explicitly claimed that its programmes have already placed pressure on the government and forced it to respond politically.

Neither side is likely to abandon its preferred method easily.

The government faces the pressure of time

The BNP government's strongest political argument is that many of the problems highlighted by the opposition are real but cannot be resolved immediately.

Energy shortages, inflation, weak investment, banking-sector vulnerabilities, unemployment and law-and-order concerns are structural problems that require administrative capacity and sustained policy intervention.

The government therefore wants political space to implement its election commitments.

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman has repeatedly framed his government's approach around democratic institutions, economic recovery and delivery of election promises. At a BNP founding-anniversary programme on September 5, he warned that political parties and individuals attempting to create disorder through misinformation or confusion would face legal action. At the same time, he said the government would uphold democratic principles and the democratic process.

He also identified the energy crisis as one of the major problems facing the country and said the government had inherited economic difficulties in addition to challenges in healthcare, education and communications.

The government's problem is that public expectations are likely to be much faster than administrative solutions.

An opposition party does not need to prove that every government policy has failed to gain political traction. It only needs to demonstrate that people continue to experience problems.

If electricity or fuel shortages persist, if commodity prices remain high, or if law-and-order concerns continue, opposition parties will naturally use those issues to challenge the government.

This creates a difficult political balance for the BNP: it must demonstrate visible progress while resisting pressure that could encourage a cycle of permanent street confrontation.

Jamaat's democratic argument

Jamaat Ameer and Leader of the Opposition Dr Shafiqur Rahman has attempted to place the party's political campaign within a broader argument about democratic institutionalisation.

Ahead of International Democracy Day, he accused the BNP government of forgetting its pre-election pledge to institutionalise democracy. He argued that the July 2024 mass uprising had created a historic opportunity to strengthen democracy, rule of law, citizens' rights and freedom of expression.

Jamaat's political argument therefore goes beyond immediate economic grievances. The party wants to present itself as a defender of the political transformation that followed the July uprising.

That creates an important challenge for the BNP government.

The government came to power through an election and can therefore claim electoral legitimacy. But electoral legitimacy alone does not end political contestation. The government must also demonstrate institutional accountability, freedom of expression, fair political competition and effective public services.

At the same time, opposition parties face a similar responsibility. Demanding democratic reform

National Citizen Party (NCP) Convener and Opposition Chief Whip Nahid Islam speaks at the first central council of the Jatiya Chhatra Shakti at Dhaka University on September 12

while attempting to force political change through street mobilisation raises questions about how opposition politics should operate within an elected system.

The durability of Bangladesh's new political order will depend partly on whether these competing claims can coexist without turning political competition into institutional conflict.

NCP introduces another layer of competition

The National Citizen Party complicates the emerging political equation.

The NCP emerged from the political forces associated with the July uprising and has sought to position itself as a representative of the younger generation. Its leaders have accused the BNP government of failing to fulfil the aspirations of the mass uprising.

NCP Convener and Opposition Chief Whip Nahid Islam has argued that the government is moving towards an undemocratic approach and has criticised its handling of the referendum verdict, energy shortages and law-and-order concerns.

The government and BNP reject such criticisms, while NCP leaders insist that the post-uprising political transformation remains incomplete.

This produces a triangular political competition.

The BNP seeks to establish itself as the governing force capable of delivering stability and economic recovery.

Jamaat seeks to strengthen its opposition position through both street mobilisation and electoral participation.

The NCP seeks to retain the political momentum of the July generation and distinguish itself from both established parties.

The Dhaka city elections could become one of the first major arenas where these competing political narratives are tested directly among voters.

Democracy cannot be reduced to elections alone

One of the central themes emerging from the current debate is the meaning of democracy itself.

The BNP stresses electoral legitimacy and parliamentary politics. Jamaat emphasises democratic rights, accountability and the ability of citizens to mobilise against government policies. The NCP stresses institutional reform and the unfinished aspirations of the July movement.

Each argument addresses part of the democratic system.

Elections determine who receives the mandate to govern, but elections alone do not guarantee effective democratic institutions. Parliamentary opposition, judicial independence, media freedom, transparent administration, accountable policing and competitive local elections are also important.

Similarly, street mobilisation is a recognised feature of democratic political life, but prolonged disruption can impose costs on ordinary citizens and the economy.

The challenge is therefore not to determine whether elections or street politics are inherently legitimate. The more important question is how political competition can remain peaceful, lawful and institutionally productive.

Foreign policy adds another dimension

Domestic political competition is unfolding alongside an effort by the new government to redefine Bangladesh's external relationships.

State Minister for Foreign Affairs Humaiun Kobir recently said Bangladesh wants to "reset" its relationship with India and build a constructive bilateral partnership through direct engagement. He described the relationship during the previous 15 years as uncomfortable and said future ties should be based on mutual interests.

The statement came amid several unresolved issues between Dhaka

and New Delhi, including border incidents and questions surrounding existing agreements.

Kobir also said the government was reviewing agreements with India through the parliamentary process and that bilateral issues would be addressed through diplomatic channels.

The government's foreign-policy message is therefore one of recalibration rather than isolation. Bangladesh wants to maintain relations with India but intends to place those relations within a broader framework of national interests and direct bilateral engagement. The timing is important. Prime Minister Tarique Rahman is scheduled to attend the United Nations General Assembly in New York from September 21 to 26. The government has said the visit will focus on Bangladesh's democratic transition, its future vision and international cooperation, while a high-level side event on the Rohingya crisis is also expected. Foreign policy could consequently become another area where the new government seeks to demonstrate that political transition is accompanied by a change in national priorities.

The central test: stability without political stagnation Bangladesh's political transition has created expectations that the country will move towards a more competitive and accountable political system. But competition itself can generate instability if political parties treat every disagreement as a struggle over the survival of the government. The BNP needs to demonstrate that its argument for stability does not become an argument against legitimate opposition.

Jamaat needs to demonstrate that its street programmes can remain peaceful and issue-focused while operating within the framework of an elected government and functioning parliament.

The NCP faces a different challenge: converting the political energy of the July generation into durable institutions rather than allowing it to remain confined to protest politics.

The upcoming local elections could provide an important test of all three approaches.

If the city polls are competitive and credible, they can strengthen confidence in electoral institutions. If opposition parties are able to campaign freely and governments at different levels are held accountable, local elections can become an important part of democratic consolidation.

> *The NCP seeks to retain the political momentum of the July generation and distinguish itself from both established parties.*

But if political competition increasingly shifts from elections to confrontation in the streets, the country could face a cycle in which every policy dispute becomes a political crisis.

A new political equilibrium is taking shape

The selection of Jamaat candidates for Dhaka's two city corporations is therefore more than a routine nomination exercise. It signals that the party is preparing for an extended political contest that will take place simultaneously on the streets, in parliament and at the ballot box.

The BNP government, meanwhile, is trying to establish its authority while dealing with economic pressures, energy shortages and high public expectations.

The NCP is seeking to keep alive the reform agenda associated with the July uprising.

And the government's attempt to reset relations with India indicates that the political transition is also affecting Bangladesh's foreign-policy outlook.

The most important question now is whether these competing forces can operate within a democratic framework without allowing political competition to become destabilising.

Bangladesh's political system will not be judged only by who wins the next election. It will also be judged by whether governments can tolerate criticism, whether opposition parties can challenge governments without paralysing public life, whether elections are competitive, and whether institutions can function independently of partisan pressure.

The Dhaka city elections may provide an early indication of how that new political equilibrium is developing.

For the BNP, the priority will be to demonstrate that electoral victory can translate into effective governance. For Jamaat, the challenge will be to convert street mobilisation and organisational expansion into sustained electoral support. For the NCP, the task will be to translate the aspirations of a political movement into institutional politics.

The outcome of this contest will shape not only the next round of local elections but potentially the character of Bangladesh's post-July political order.

The country has entered a period in which political legitimacy will increasingly be contested on several

New Pay Hike

Will it aggravate distress for majority?

Apu Ahmed

The present government has taken a bold decision to implement the new pay scale for public employees in four phases over the next two years.

Timing Is Critical

However, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party-led government is fulfilling the public employees' demand for a pay hike more than a decade after the last one was introduced in 2015. The new pay scale issue was passed on by the interim administration run by Muhammad Yunus to the new government. Given the chronic shortfall in revenue generation, economic headwinds, the poor quality of public services, and the controversial role of a section of the bureaucracy during the 15-year regime of the Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League, the appointment of the Ninth National Pay Commission in July 2025—seven months before the general election won by the BNP—was surprising to economists. Salary increases for government employees deserve due consideration, but the timing and execution are critical when the economy is sluggish and private sector investment is depressed.

Pay Hike Amid Economic Woes Carries More Rusks

Furthermore, public pay hikes during an economic downturn are generally discouraged under prudent macroeconomic guidelines. From a strict economic theory perspective, raising public sector wages during a downturn or high-inflation environment introduces significant macroeconomic risks. However, governments often face competing social and administrative realities, making the decision to implement the pay hike unavoidable yet challenging. Political considerations come first, as a large section of the current administration was recruited during the AL regime. Many of them were shocked by the fall of the regime on August 5, 2024, in the wake of a mass uprising—barely seven months after

the AL secured yet another five-year term through general elections boycotted by the majority of political parties. Many mid-ranking, ambitious bureaucrats had planned to hold key public posts over the next five years, but the 35-day July Uprising knocked down the regime beyond anyone's expectations. Delaying the new pay scale could create opportunities for disgruntled elements within the bureaucracy to exploit the situation.

Key Features of New Pay Scale

Nevertheless, the new government faces severe fiscal challenges in meeting the demands of the bureaucrats who cannot avoid responsibility for allowing the Tax-to-GDP ratio to fall below 7 percent from a previous 11 percent. Implementing the pay hike—which will require over Tk 1 lakh crore annually—amid weak revenue mobilization will be carried out in four phases until 2028. Phasing it in will relieve some fiscal stress, though not entirely. Effective retrospectively from July 1, 2026, basic pay will be disbursed in three phases from July 2026 through July 2027, while updated allowances will take effect on January 1, 2028. Key features of the new package include a mobile allowance for all grades, a disability allowance of Tk 3,000 per month per child for employees with special-needs children, and enhanced pension benefits.

Wage Growth Lags Inflation

While government employees will welcome the new pay scale, a broader concern is whether the administration is catering disproportionately to the bureaucracy. The most pressing issue is that government employees are receiving wage increases while the country's broader wage growth has lagged behind inflation for the past four years. Economists note that this continuous gap has eroded real incomes, forcing low- and middle-income families to cut back on essentials, trim grocery budgets, or take on debt. Public servants account for only about 2 percent of the country's 70-million-strong workforce; the remaining 98 percent work in the private sector, which is struggling to invest and create jobs. With private sector credit growth dropping to a record low of 4.47 percent in June 2026 and remaining below 5 percent for four consecutive months, fresh job creation remains unlikely.

> ***Many mid-ranking, ambitious bureaucrats had planned to hold key public posts over the next five years, but the 35-day July Uprising knocked down the regime beyond anyone's expectations. Delaying the new pay scale could create opportunities for disgruntled elements within the bureaucracy to exploit the situation.***

Public-Private Gap Widens

The government is well aware of how jobless growth and high unemployment among university graduates over the past decade fueled the mass uprising that ousted the previous regime on August 5, 2024. Within the private sector, 86 percent of workers operate in the informal economy, leaving tens of millions of daily wage earners heavily exposed to rising commodity and food prices without minimum wage protections. According to the Minimum Wages Board, while 47 industrial sectors have designated wage structures (44 of which are operational), enforcement varies widely. Dr. Fahmida Khatun, a Distinguished Fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), noted that while the pay hikes will improve the welfare of public employees, the government also bears a responsibility toward workers in the private sector. Effective measures must be taken to prevent the new pay structure from widening the wage gap between public and private sector workers.

Borrowing Is the Option

Although the pay hike is being phased over two years to ease budgetary pressures, the

government will likely have no choice but to borrow from the banking system given the persistent revenue shortfall. These risks crowding out the private sector at a time when private credit growth is already contracting. Citizens have previously seen the fallout from wage increases financed by deficit spending. The former regime relied heavily on borrowing to meet non-development expenditure, including official salaries and allowances. The White Paper on the State of the Bangladesh Economy, prepared by a panel of economists led by Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya, criticized the nearly 100 percent pay hike in 2015 as an effort to appease the bureaucracy following the controversial 2014 elections. The report noted that those wage increases, combined with weak revenue collection, fueled rising public debt and debt-service obligations—a major contributor to the economic downturn following the Russia-Ukraine war.

High Inflation Persists

Finally, the new pay scale arrives as the government struggles to contain inflation. Point-to-point inflation eased slightly to 8.26 percent in August from 8.32 percent in July and 9.16 percent in June—its lowest rate in 10 months—but remains elevated. Since FY23, households have endured high inflation driven by macroeconomic mismanagement. Expanding the monetary supply to fund the pay scale risks rekindling inflationary pressures, placing the broader public at risk of further economic hardship to accommodate public sector pay demands. ■

Rupayan City Uttara Banglalink sign MoU

Business Outlook Report

Rupayan City Uttara and Banglalink Digital Communications Ltd have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to establish faster and more modern communication with residents and customers through digital platforms. The agreement was signed by representatives of the two organisations at an event organised by Rupayan City Uttara on September 10. The initiative aims to make communication with residents easier, faster and more organised while improving technology-driven customer service. Banglalink Large Corporate Director Rubaiyat Alam Tanzin, Business Solutions Director Md Asaduzzaman and Head of Business Solutions Nafiz Ahmed Sayeed attended the signing ceremony. Rupayan City Uttara CEO Brig Gen (retd) Md Ahsan Habib and Head of Marketing Md Khorshed Alam Polen represented the company. Ahsan Habib said Rupayan City Uttara, the country's first premium mega gated community, regularly introduces new facilities and initiatives for its residents and customers. "Through this partnership with Banglalink, technology-driven communication will help us keep our customers more connected, informed and engaged," he said. He said the partnership was not limited to communication but was an important step towards creating an easier, improved and more connected customer experience. Rupayan City Uttara authorities said digital communication would play an important role in delivering essential information and updates to customers quickly. The initiative is expected to make communication between the company and its residents and customers more dynamic and effective. The company said Banglalink's digital communication infrastructure and technological capabilities would create opportunities to expand its customer services and strengthen its long-term relationship with residents and customers. Rupayan City Uttara has focused on modern housing facilities as well as civic and community services for residents. The latest partnership is part of its efforts to further improve customer service through digital communication. ■

Better Late Than Never

Revival of Decades-Old Mega Projects

Apu Ahmed

The current government has revived an over five- decades-long initiative aiming at constructing a chord line on the Dhaka–Cumilla section of the Dhaka–Chattogram railway route, which will reduce the overall distance between the two major cities by around 80 kilometers and boost trade and business on the country's most busy corridor.

Benefits from Chord Line

Finance and Planning Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury unveiled the revival plan while presenting the national budget proposal for the 2026–27 fiscal year in the national parliament. He said the feasibility study for the project has already been completed, and among three proposed alignments, a route from Shyampur in Narayanganj to Cumilla has been preliminarily finalized. Once implemented, the proposed chord line would reduce the existing Dhaka–Chattogram rail distance from about 320 kilometers to nearly 240 kilometers. The travel time between Dhaka and Chattogram is expected to decrease from around five hours to about three and a half hours. Besides, cargo trains carrying goods from Chattogram Port, the Bay Terminal, and the Matarbari Deep Sea Port will be able to connect directly to the proposed Dhirashram Inland Container Depot (ICD) through the existing Chattogram–Feni–Cumilla–Brahm anbaria–Bhairab–Narsingdi railway line, facilitating the cargo transportation system.

This is not the first time that a minister has highlighted the necessity of the rail line on the Dhaka–Chattogram corridor, which has been called the lifeline of the country. It carries nearly 85 percent to 96 percent of Bangladesh's total import and export cargo and generates roughly 40 percent to 50 percent of the entire country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), despite covering only about 16 percent of the national land area. Almost all

international maritime container traffic relies on this single route to move goods to and from Chattogram Port. Because this single highway and rail axis holds a near-monopoly on the country's industrial logistics, any gridlock or delay on it directly impacts national competitiveness, which is why projects like the rail chord line and highway expansions are deemed high priorities.

Project Conceived in 1969

In fact, the importance of the rail line was described by many other ministers of successive governments over the past five decades. The first proposal for a shortcut chord line was considered roughly two years prior to the 1971 Liberation War to resolve the operational inefficiency of the colonial-era route. But until the 1980s, there were no detailed feasibility studies to finalize route alignments. However, political instability and the 1990 Mass Uprising against military dictator HM Ershad caused the project to be shelved before construction could start.

In the 1990s, the Railway Reorganization Reforms Formulation Committee reviewed national rail priorities and recommended an allocation of Tk 900 crore in the FY1998–1999 budget specifically for theDhaka–Cumilla(Narayanganj–Laksam) chordline. However, the government faced severe macroeconomic constraints and lacked the massive capital required to initiate the project without heavy foreign backing, causing the proposal to be tabled. Besides, strategic focus was redirected toward expanding and upgrading the Dhaka–Chattogram Highway to meet immediate commercial demands, leaving mega-railway projects sidelined.

MoU in 2014

More than a decade later, the project was revived again when Bangladesh Railway (BR) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with China Railway Eryuan Engineering Group Co. Ltd in 2014. Following the MoU, then the Awami League government's interest shifted heavily toward building a much more expensive, full-scale Dhaka–Chattogram High-Speed Rail corridor. In 2018, BR signed a separate, competing

MoU with another entity—China Railway Construction Corporation International (CRCCI). The overlapping interests caused a diplomatic headache. The Chinese government later complained to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) that BR's subsequent high-speed rail MoU with CRCCI was signed through inappropriate channels, which led the government to scrap the high-speed rail MoU altogether.

Entry of Japan, exist of China

By the time the chord line project was revived as a high-priority initiative, the government abandoned the old Chinese G2G framework. To maintain transparency and secure open funding, the government partnered with the Asian Development Bank (ADB), leading to the competitive hiring of a Japan-France-Malaysia consortium (OC Global, EGIS, HSS) to handle the modern feasibility study and structural design. The consortium has already completed the feasibility study for the route, analyzing four alternative route layouts to determine the most cost-effective and structurally viable path. It finalized the Shyampur (Narayanganj) to Cumilla route, spanning a length of 231 to 236 kilometers. This layout will bypass the massive Akhaura loop, shortening the current Dhaka–Chattogram railway corridor by approximately 80 to 90 kilometers.

More Hurdles Remain

There are still more hurdles to be crossed before the chord line is laid. The project has not yet received final approval from the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC). The project is currently at the preliminary study and development stage. While the government has approved allocations for feasibility studies, detailed route designs, and initial project preparations (DPP), full main-phase approval by ECNEC remains pending. Before reaching ECNEC for final administrative and budget sanction, Bangladesh Railway must complete the final Development Project Proposal (DPP), secure development partner financing, and submit the proposal through the Planning Commission. The

primary funding for the proposed project is planned under a hybrid mechanism: the Government of Bangladesh's internal capital allocations sourced through the Annual Development Programme (ADP) via the Ministry of Railways (which allocates domestic budget funds, such as the Tk 9,940 crore budget set for rail infrastructure in the current FY27), combined with foreign loans. Major Bangladesh Railway mega-corridors rely heavily on foreign assistance; historically, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), along with potential co-financiers like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), are the primary multilateral partners targeted for major railway corridor loans once the final DPP is completed.

Better Late Than Never

Recently another decades-old project—the establishment of a second unit of Eastern Refinery Limited (ERL)—has been taken to the final stage of implementation. A deal on borrowing $1 billion has been signed to fund the refinery project that will increase crude oil refining capacity threefold to 4.5 million tonnes. ERL was commissioned in 1968, and now, nearly six decades later, its refining capacity will expand. Like the Dhaka–Cumilla chord line project, the ERL expansion project had been delayed for reasons such as politics, bureaucracy, and shortage of funds. As both crucial projects approach

Super Sale Car Bazar brings cars bikes under one roof at ICCB

Business Outlook Report

Vehicle buyers and sellers in the capital can now trade cars and motorcycles under one roof as the newly launched 'Super Sale Car Bazar' prepares to become a regular on September 11 marketplace at the International Convention City Bashundhara (ICCB). The automobile marketplace, which was launched at the ICCB on 4 September, will next be held on Friday at 430pm, as announced earlier. The event will feature a wide range of new, used and reconditioned cars, motorcycles and utility vehicles, allowing prospective buyers to explore, compare and purchase vehicles conveniently in one location. Individuals will also have the opportunity to sell their own used motorcycles and four-wheeled vehicles directly to potential buyers. The opening event drew considerable attention from visitors, with many buyers welcoming the initiative as a convenient option in the busy capital, where purchasing or selling a vehicle can often involve considerable time and effort. Organisers said the growing demand in Bangladesh's automobile market has created a need for a regular and modern marketplace where buyers and sellers can connect directly. The Super Sale Car Bazar aims to meet that demand by bringing together vehicles of different brands and models, enabling buyers to compare their options while giving sellers direct access to prospective customers. The weekly marketplace is being organised by Wizard Showbiz, with the ICCB serving as the venue partner. Various automobile brands, dealerships, financial institutions and other businesses associated with the sector are taking part in the initiative. Alongside commercial exhibitors, privately owned new, reconditioned and used cars and motorcycles will also be available for purchase and sale, with special discounts offered on selected vehicles, the organisers said. They expressed hope that the initiative would provide a convenient and reliable platform for Bangladesh's growing community of vehicle buyers and sellers while helping create a more organised marketplace for the automobile sector. ■

11th BAPA Food Pro Expo kicks off at ICCB

Business Outlook Report

The three-day 11th BAPA FoodPro International Expo 2026 kicked off on 10 September at the International Convention City Bashundhara (ICCB) in the capital, bringing together more than 200 brands from 27 countries to showcase the latest food processing and packaging technologies.

Food Minister Afroza Khanam Rita inaugurated the event as chief guest and described the event as a platform that highlights not just Bangladeshi products but the sector's capacity and future potential.

The expo will run until Saturday. Organisers expect more than 24,000 visitors over the three days. The Bangladesh Agro-Processors Association (BAPA) and REMS Exhibitions are jointly organising the expo.

Speaking at the inauguration, the minister said the country's farmers are producing food in abundance and the priority now is to process it better, both to meet domestic demand and to boost exports.

She added that production must also prioritise quality and safety to help Bangladeshi goods gain wider global acceptance and expressed confidence that increased production, better processing, and government policy support would drive the sector forward.

Italian Ambassador to Bangladesh Antonio Alessandro attended the event as a special guest along with Bangladesh Food Safety Authority Chairman Md Shafiqul Islam. Also present were BAPA President Mahbub Anam; Ahsan Khan Chowdhury, chairman and CEO of PRAN-RFL Group and chairman of the expo's organising committee; former BAPA president Abul Hashem and BAPA General Secretary Sayed Muhammad Shoaib Hasan, among others.

Ambassador Alessandro said Bangladesh has made significant progress in food processing and called it one of the industries with strong potential to further strengthen the country's economy in the future.

Shafiqul Islam of the food safety authority said the focus now must go beyond boosting output. The value of Bangladeshi products, along with export diversification, needs to increase, while food safety and waste reduction at the production stage require attention.

Ahsan Khan Chowdhury described BAPA as a driving force behind the country's food processing sector and called for a broader revolution in agriculture and processing.

He urged foreign investors to put more money into Bangladesh and called it an excellent investment destination undergoing an important transformation with growing potential.

BAPA President Anam said the association has worked since its founding to ensure safe food for the public and aims to strengthen the global position of Bangladesh's processed food products, calling the expo part of that broader effort to build a safe food supply chain.

He added that the expo connects local entrepreneurs with new technologies and potential business partners, supporting investment, production, product diversification, and export growth.

Participating companies are displaying modern technology across processing, filling, packaging, coding and marking, labelling, quality inspection, warehousing, cold chain, and logistics. AI-driven automation, machine vision, robotics, smart factories, industrial IoT, modern processing machinery, and sustainable packaging are getting special emphasis this year, with more than 4,000 technology and machinery-based solutions on display.

Participating countries include Algeria, Australia, Bangladesh, China, France, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Iran, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Poland, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey, Spain, Sweden, the UK, and the US.

Over the three days, more than 100 expert speakers and industry leaders will take part in regional conferences, seminars, and hands-on sessions. The co-located Food Ingredients Bangladesh Expo 2026 is showcasing functional food and beverages, nutraceuticals, alternative proteins, plant-based formulations, and sustainable food ingredients.

Other segments of the expo include a session stage, FP Gourmet, DrinkSphere, the Global Food Security and Technology Forum, and a Creative Design Village.

The expo is open to visitors from 10am to 7pm on 10 and 11 September and from 10am to 630pm on 12 September. ■

EasyBuy.com.bd launches platform to simplify China sourcing

Business Outlook Report

EasyBuy.com.bd, a cross-border wholesale marketplace and sourcing platform, has launched to simplify product sourcing from China for Bangladeshi entrepreneurs.

The platform was unveiled at a ceremony at its corporate office in Elephant Road, Dhaka, under the slogan "Source Easy, Grow Fast".

EasyBuy.com.bd enables entrepreneurs to search for and source a wide range of products from China at wholesale prices based on their business requirements.

For aspiring entrepreneurs, students and professionals looking to start online or small-scale businesses, selecting suitable products, identifying suppliers and navigating the sourcing process in China can be challenging. The platform aims to make the process easier and more streamlined.

"Our goal is to simplify the process of sourcing products from China, create new business opportunities for Bangladeshi entrepreneurs and help them grow their businesses,"

said Kauser Khandoker, founder and managing director of EasyBuy.com.bd.

Mahsin Ali, co-founder of the company, said the platform aims to help entrepreneurs source quality products more easily and launch and expand their businesses.

EasyBuy.com.bd is an affiliate of Galaxy Cargo International, which has operated in the China-Bangladesh trade and logistics sector since 2016.

The platform draws on the company's experience in cross-border trade and its network in China to support entrepreneurs throughout the sourcing process.

According to the company, it operates its own warehouse and office in China, supported by local employees and a dedicated sourcing team that assists customers in identifying and procuring products.

EasyBuy.com.bd aims to serve existing small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as aspiring entrepreneurs, students, professionals and e-commerce businesses seeking easier access to products from China. ■

Emergency bill payments Loans up to Tk10,000 available via bank apps

Business Outlook Report

To pay emergency bills or necessary fees, short-term loans of up to Tk10,000 ($83 USD) can now be taken directly from bank mobile applications.

However, this loan money cannot be withdrawn in cash or transferred to another bank account. The loan funds must be used directly to pay the designated service providers for bills or fees.

Bangladesh Bank has issued a policy guideline introducing this loan under the name E-Payment Credit.

Issued on Sunday, the guideline states that the purpose of this initiative is to address temporary liquidity shortages for customers and to expand digital transactions.

According to the policy, no interest will be charged on this loan. Instead, a fixed fee will be levied based on the loan amount and repayment period.

The tenure options for the loan will be 7, 15, or 30 days.

For loan amounts ranging from Tk50 to Tk250, the maximum fees for 7, 15, and 30-day tenures are Tk3, Tk4, and Tk6, respectively.

For loan amounts between Tk7,001 and Tk10,000, the maximum fees for the same tenures are Tk35, Tk70, and Tk130, respectively.

In other words, if a customer takes a loan of Tk10,000 and selects a 30-day tenure, they will have to pay a maximum fee of Tk130.

The principal amount and the fee must be repaid together.

The repayment period expires on the 8th day for a 7-day loan, on the 16th day for a 15-day loan, and on the 31st day for a 30-day loan.

Customers may repay the loan before the scheduled due date if they choose. In that case, no interest, prepayment, early settlement, or foreclosure fees can be charged beyond the designated fixed fee.

However, if a customer fails to repay the loan on time, daily penalty fees can be charged for the overdue period. This penalty cannot exceed the daily fee set for a 30-day tenure.

This credit facility can be used to pay utility bills, mobile top-ups, education and healthcare expenses, deposit scheme installments, insurance premiums, tolls, tickets, taxes, and various government fees. ■

Govt may pay more for faster Chinese LNG terminal amid gas crisis: Zahed

Business Outlook Report

Bangladesh may accept somewhat higher costs to secure a floating LNG terminal from China quickly as the government seeks to tackle the country's growing gas and electricity shortages, Prime Minister's Information and Broadcasting Adviser Dr Zahed Ur Rahman said.

"The most important issue for the government now is to get an FSRU (Floating Storage and Regasification Unit) quickly to address the gas and power crisis," he told a press conference on progress in various government activities on 8 September.

He said Bangladesh could not currently increase LNG imports at will because the country lacked sufficient regasification capacity to convert imported LNG into gas.

The two existing floating storage and regasification units (FSRUs) have a combined capacity of around 1.1 billion cubic feet of gas per day, he said.

"Even if we want to bring in a large amount of LNG, we do not have the capacity to regasify all of it. Therefore, it is essential to bring in more FSRUs for LNG regasification," the adviser said.

He said the government had placed an urgent order with China for an FSRU, which was expected to be delivered in around 18 months.

However, he stressed that securing the FSRU alone would not be enough, as the necessary infrastructure, including transmission pipelines, would also have to be developed to supply gas from the terminal.

"Our crisis is the immediate concern. Getting this urgently has now become more important than the overall process," he said.

Asked about the possibility of higher costs for procuring the FSRU from China, Zahed said some additional expenditure could be accepted because of the need for a faster solution.

"Rather than calculating a specific percentage of additional costs, what is more important now is addressing the country's economic crisis," he said.

The adviser warned that prolonged gas and electricity shortages could cause significant damage to the economy, while the losses to state resources caused by power outages could be "unimaginably high".

He cited captive power plants as an example, saying that when gas supplies are unavailable, industrial units are forced to generate electricity using oil.

This can increase production costs several-fold and undermine the competitiveness of the affected businesses, he said. ■

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Game-Changer for RMG

Revolutionising The Cotton Corridor

How a Private US Initiative in Chattogram is Slashing Lead Times, Lowering Procurement Costs, and Unlocking a $100-Billion Bilateral Trade Vision

Anisul Islam Noor

While official government initiatives to set up a dedicated warehouse for American cotton in Bangladesh have seen little progress, private enterprise has stepped into the breach. Spearheaded by US business figures, a major private initiative is moving swiftly to make high-grade American fiber readily accessible to domestic textile manufacturers and garment exporters.

At the center of this structural shift is AmeriBangla Corporation, led by 32-year-old Bangladeshi-American entrepreneur Aswar Rahman. The company is setting up operations for what will be Bangladesh's first privately operated warehouse for US cotton, situated in Anwara, Chattogram, near the government-designated Free Trade Zone. Operates jointly with a local Bangladeshi partner, the facility is scheduled for an official launch on November 18, 2026, marking a significant milestone in US-Bangladesh economic ties.

Around 100 tonnes of cotton have already left a US port bound for Bangladesh to stock the facility initially. The local warehouse model is designed to solve one of the garment industry's most persistent bottlenecks: crippling supply-chain lead times.

Slashing Lead Times from Months to Days:

Spinning and textile mills rank among the largest consumers of raw cotton in Bangladesh. Sourcing raw cotton through standard overseas import channels currently requires nearly 90 days from order

placement to port arrival. The local warehouse model compresses this waiting period significantly, providing instant access to stock and granting domestic spinners a crucial competitive advantage in lead times.

Showkat Aziz Russell, President of the Bangladesh Textile Mills Association (BTMA), welcomed the development as a positive turn for textile mill owners. "If there is a warehouse for US cotton in Bangladesh, everyone will buy from it because importing cotton after placing an order takes nearly 90 days," Russell noted, adding that a physical stock facility in Bangladesh will also reduce price uncertainty.

Russell revealed that while the BTMA had written to the government regarding the stalled public-sector warehouse plan, the industry stands ready to support private ventures. "If someone now wants to establish such a warehouse under a private initiative, we will lobby the government on their behalf if necessary," he affirmed.

Mahmud Hasan Khan Babu, President of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), echoed this enthusiasm, stating that a privately operated cotton warehouse will deliver direct operational benefits to apparel manufacturers.

Bypassing Intermediaries: Lowering Procurement Costs:

Beyond logistics, the local warehouse promises tangible cost reductions for spinning mills and factories, particularly those operating with smaller capital capacities.

Because AmeriBangla purchases cotton directly from farmers and ginners in the United States, it eliminates multi-tiered intermediary markups. Under conventional import channels, US cotton costs approximately $0.85 per pound upon arrival at Chattogram Port. Through its direct-sourcing warehouse model, AmeriBangla expects to sell stock locally at around $0.10 less per pound than prevailing spot market rates.

Industry players have already taken notice. Ataur Rahman, a senior official at Envoy Textile—one of the country's leading cotton importers—confirmed that his firm test-imported a small quantity of cotton from AmeriBangla. "Since AmeriBangla has the opportunity to source cotton directly from farmers and ginners, they may be able to supply it at prices lower than prevailing market rates," he explained, noting that if the company can scale up volume while maintaining competitive pricing, it could become a major supplier.

Though US cotton carries a slight price premium compared to some alternative markets, textile leaders emphasize that its superior quality yields significantly lower wastage, reinforcing its long-term cost-effectiveness.

The Multi-Billion-Dollar Tariff Advantage

The operational rollout coincides with historic developments in US-Bangladesh trade relations. Under recent trade frameworks, apparel manufactured using certified American cotton is expected to receive tariff exemptions and duty benefits upon entering the US market.

In FY 2024–25, Bangladesh exported $8.69 billion worth of goods to the United States. This included $4.95 billion in woven garments (accounting for 27.21% of total woven exports), $2.60 billion in knitwear (12.27% of total knitwear exports), $259 million in caps, and $150 million in home textiles. During the same fiscal year, Bangladesh imported $346 million worth of US cotton—representing roughly 10 percent of its total cotton imports—up from $278 million in FY 2023–24.

With tariff-benefit mechanisms taking shape, apparel leaders project that Bangladeshi imports of US cotton could surge to $2 billion annually.

Aswar Rahman outlined the specific fiscal benefits awaiting end buyers: "The benefits to end buyers of cotton garments will be a 10–19% reduction in duties, and an 18%

transferable tax credit on the value of all raw American cotton in their products." Combined, US buyers could capture savings equivalent to at least 19% of total garment value, providing Bangladeshi exporters with a substantial indirect edge.

Traceability and the Strategic Autumn Roadmap:

To ensure compliance for duty relief, a rigorous certification process combining industrial reporting, third-party physical audits, and isotopic testing conducted by US state universities will verify that garments are indeed produced using raw American cotton.

The warehouse rollout forms part of a multi-phase strategic roadmap designed to elevate total US-Bangladesh bilateral trade from under $10 billion to $100 billion by 2045. Speaking to journalists at a hotel in Dhaka, Aswar Rahman detailed several interconnected programs kicking off this autumn:

CottonPort Platform: Launched on August 27, 2026, 'CottonPort' operates as Bangladesh's first digital marketplace for floating auctions of raw US cotton, connecting local spinning mills directly with American growers to ensure supply chain transparency and fair pricing.

All American Cotton Certification Program: Debuting in Manhattan on October 8, 2026, this serves as the sole certification compliant with upcoming US Customs tariff exemptions and the proposed Buy American Cotton Act.

AmeriBangla Cotton Lab: Launching in New York City, this incubator will select up to 10 emerging fashion designers to produce apparel lines in Bangladesh using certified US cotton, yarn, and fabric.

Anwara Warehouse Expansion: Opening on November 18 with an initial inventory of 80 to 100 metric

tons at a leased facility, the operation plans to transition into a permanent facility in the Anwara Free Trade Zone, supported by US federal entities including the USDA, the US State Department, and the US EXIM Bank.

Navigating Market and Regulatory Landscapes:

Addressing operational challenges, Rahman acknowledged potential risks surrounding regulatory frameworks, shifting tax regimes, and bureaucratic procedures in Bangladesh. However, he expressed confidence regarding market stability, noting that domestic cotton prices remain grounded in US cotton futures.

As Bangladeshi exporters wait for official announcements from Washington and the US Embassy in Dhaka regarding final tariff procedures, the November launch of the Chattogram warehouse marks a decisive turn. By marrying digital trading with physical port-side warehousing, private enterprise is unlocking a faster, lower-cost, and duty-advantaged future for Bangladesh's apparel industry.

For Inside:

From Cinema and Campaigns to Global Commerce: The Evolution of ASWAR RAHMAN

At just 32 years old, Bangladeshi-American entrepreneur Aswar Rahman has navigated a career trajectory marked by creative ambition, political engagement, and multi-billion-dollar trade logistics. Today, as CEO of AmeriBangla Corporation, Rahman is driving a strategic vision to elevate US-Bangladesh trade to $100 billion by 2045.

Early Life & Rapid Academic Ascent:

Immigrating from Bangladesh to Minnesota with his family in 2001, Rahman grew up in South Minneapolis. Displaying early intellectual momentum, he entered college at age 16 and graduated with a bachelor's degree from the University of Minnesota by 19.

Creative Arts & Filmmaking:

Driven by a passion for visual storytelling, Rahman launched his career in filmmaking and media production. He founded Cineapolis—a Minnesota-based feature film collective—and Eloquent Design, a web development and user-experience firm. His work spanned award-winning short films, corporate campaigns for global brands, and appearances in

American broadcast media.

Civic Leadership & Mayoral Campaign:

Rahman's commitment to community welfare led him into local governance and political activism. After working on youth policy under former Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak, Rahman stepped into the national spotlight in 2017 when he launched a bid for Mayor of Minneapolis at age 23. Running on a platform focused on poverty alleviation, police reform, and fiscal responsibility, his campaign highlighted his commitment to civic progress.

Pivot to International Trade & Enterprise:

Leveraging his background in strategy and digital media, Rahman shifted his focus to global trade infrastructure. Identifying strategic supply chain gaps between the US agricultural sector and Bangladesh's textile industry, he spearheaded the establishment of AmeriBangla Corporation.

Key milestones of his current business enterprise include:

Digital Innovation: Launching 'CottonPort' in 2026, Bangladesh's first digital floating auction marketplace connecting local spinning mills directly with US cotton farmers.

Supply Chain Infrastructure: Establishing Bangladesh's first privately operated US cotton warehouse in Anwara, Chattogram, set to open in November 2026 to drastically cut lead times and procurement costs for local apparel exporters.

Trade Integration: Spearheading the All American Cotton™ Certification Program to help Bangladeshi manufacturers access proposed US tariff reductions and tax credits.

AmeriBangla Corporation:

Legal Structure & Headquarters: Incorporated in Delaware, USA (established in mid-2024), with its global headquarters located at 40 Wall Street, Manhattan, New York.

Leadership: Founded and led by CEO Aswar Rahman, a Bangladeshi-American entrepreneur.

Core Vision & Roadmap: Set an overarching strategic goal to expand US–Bangladesh bilateral trade from approximately $10 billion to $100 billion by 2045.

Primary Business Operations:

CottonPort Marketplace: Operates 'CottonPort' (and local subsidiary CottonPort Limited), Bangladesh's first 24/7 digital floating auction platform connecting domestic spinning mills directly with US cotton farmers and ginners. ■

bKash, Bishwo Shahitto Kendro celebrate 12 years of joint journey in book reading program

Business Outlook Report

What a person observes in childhood, they try to recreate it throughout their life, said Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed, chairman and chief executive of Bishwo Shahitto Kendro.

The eminent educator and writer reminisced about how deeply his father influenced him in spreading books and the habit of reading.

Regarding the expansion of the book reading program across the country, he said "There were many struggles along this journey, but we also received help from many quarters- personal, social, institutional, and government support. Among the non-state organizations that provided major assistance, one was bKash."

"Over these 12 years, we received 400,000 books from bKash, which were distributed to various educational institutions nationwide. These 400,000 books have been read by at least 3.2 million readers and students. If bKash had invested this money elsewhere, they might have made a profit. Whether bKash benefited financially from it or not, I don't know, but the nation has certainly benefited from the partnership," he added.

Prof Sayeed expressed these views in a video message during an event organized in the capital on September 4 to mark the 12th anniversary of the partnership between Bishwo Shahitto Kendra and bKash to spread the book reading program across the country.

Dr ANM Ehsanul Hoque Milon, Minister of Education, attended the event as chief guest.

Among others present were Kamal Quadir, chief executive officer of bKash; Major General Sheikh Md Monirul Islam (retd), chief external and corporate affairs officer of bKash; and Khandakar Md Asaduzzaman, executive director of Bishwo Shahitto Kendro.

Additionally, over three hundred students and their teachers from various schools as well as civil society members attended the event.

In his chief guest's address, Education Minister stated "Positive change is needed in society, and the Prime Minister is working hard toward it. The government is giving the highest priority to improving the quality of education in the country, which must begin right from the primary level. Priority is also being given to technical education."

bKash's founder and CEO Kamal Quadir said "Since the beginning of our journey, bKash's goal has been to bring a positive change in the economy by driving financial inclusion in the country. At the same time, as a responsible corporate entity, we believe that education and the pursuit of knowledge are among the core foundations of sustainable development. It is from this belief that bKash has been associated with Bishwo Shahitto Kendro's book reading program for the last 12 years."

The nationwide 'Book Reading Program' of Bishwo Shahitto Kendro stands as one of the largest and long-term initiatives dedicated to instilling reading habits, critical thinking, and human values among students.

For over four decades, Bishwo Shahitto Kendro has been running this program across the country.

Embracing this vision of Bishwo Shahitto Kendro as part of its corporate social responsibility, bKash has been continuously associated with the initiative for 12 years since 2014.

Through this partnership, bKash has distributed more than 400,000 books to libraries of various educational institutions across the country.

The books distributed have reached nearly 3,000 educational institutions, directly benefiting over 3.2 million students and readers. ■

NCC Bank launches Bangla QR service

Business Outlook Report

NCC Bank has recently launched Bangla QR services at various selected retail merchant points across the country.

The primary objective of this initiative is to expand the scope of cashless and digital transactions nationwide and ensure easy, fast, and secure payment facilities for customers.

The bank's managing director M Shamsul Arefin inaugurated the service by distributing Bangla QR codes to approximately 200 retail merchants at Sonargaon Janopath Road, the Ceramic Market adjacent to Tongi Chirag Ali Bus Stand, and Savar New Market.

With the launch of this service, small traders, shop owners, and general consumers in those areas will be able to reduce their reliance on cash and make digital payments simply by scanning the QR code.

This will not only make transactions faster and safer but will also preserve a digital record of every transaction.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by Md Habibur Rahman, the bank's deputy managing director; Mohammad Tariqul Amin, SEVP (corporate banking); AKM Jahidul Alam, EVP & head of operations; Md Jashimuddin, SVP & region head of Outskirt Dhaka; Sharif Mohammad Mahsin, SVP & head of SME; Md Sajjadul Islam, SVP & head of ICT; Md Anisur Rahman Majumder, VP & head of financial inclusion cell; SM Tanvir Hasan, head of retail business unit, DFS Business & Bangla QR, along with other senior officials of the bank.

Through Bangla QR, customers can easily complete payments using any bank or MFS app.

On the other hand, merchants will be able to receive interbank digital payments through a unified QR code.

This will reduce the risks associated with carrying and using cash, while also keeping a digital record of every transaction.

Managing director of NCC Bank M Shamsul Arefin said Through the launch of Bangla QR, NCC Bank has established an important milestone in making the country's digital and cashless transaction system more accessible. Bringing small traders and retail merchants into the mainstream of digital transactions is one of our top priorities. Bangla QR is an interbank payment platform where customers can transact seamlessly and securely, and merchants can receive payments from customers of various banks and financial institutions through a common QR system. The launch of this service at Sonargaon Janopath Road, Tongi Market, and Savar New Market reflects the continuity of our digital banking expansion. We will continue our efforts to extend this service to other important commercial and retail markets across the country in the future. ■

Country's economic growth forecast cut to 6% by IMF

Business Outlook Report

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) on September 8 reduced Bangladesh's economic growth forecast for FY24 from 6.5% to 6%, a week after revising the forecast for its GDP growth projection, owing to high inflation and external payment worries.

In April this year, the IMF had projected a 6.5% economic growth for FY24.

The global lender said that Bangladesh's economy grew 6% in the immediate fiscal year, according to its World Economic Outlook published today.

However, it also revised its projections for Bangladesh's growth to 6% for FY23 from its previous forecast of 5.5%.

The report also included the point of uncertainty ahead of the election as a major risk to the economy, along with stabilization of the external sector dependent on removing distortions in exchange rates and lifting exchange rates.

Failure to address these risks may put the economy under more pressure than the projection, it has stated in the Bangladesh Development Update of the World Bank, titled New Frontiers in Poverty Reduction.

Despite the government's efforts to provide essential food items to low-income groups at subsidized rates, inflation is anticipated to disproportionately affect the poor, the report added.

The World Bank projected 6.2% GDP growth for Bangladesh's FY24 fiscal in April.

The multilateral lender keeps the 2023 global growth forecast for 2023 unchanged, despite significant underlying differences between regions, while lifting its inflation outlook for the next couple of years, as per an AFP report.

Emerging markets and developing economies are projected to have a modest decline in growth from 4.1% in 2022 to 4.0% in both 2023 and 2024.

Global inflation is forecast to decline steadily, from 8.7% in 2022 to 6.9% in 2023 and 5.8% in 2024, due to tighter monetary policy aided by lower international commodity prices. ■

Experts Urgent financial reforms required to stop forex from dropping below $15bn

Business Outlook Report

Urgent reforms are required, according to Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute (PRI), to prevent the country's forex reserves from dropping below the $15 billion threshold.

Right now, we have to take a short-term plan to maintain the level of the forex reserve. Bangladesh must explore all possible options, including getting the second tranche of loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), support from the World Bank and other bilateral sources, to save its reserves," he added.

Long-term reforms in Bangladesh's economy, despite being long overdue, have taken a backseat mainly due to depleting foreign exchange (forex) reserves and inflation.

Given this context, before the National Election that may be held early January next year, economists in a discussion on Sunday recommended making a few short-term changes in the financial sector.

The seminar was recently jointly organized by the World Bank and South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (Sanem) titled "Fiscal Challenges in South Asia."

Even after borrowing, they advised maintaining a forex reserve of $15 billion.

The continued economic crisis, according to the discussants, will invariably be extended. Hence, any opportunity should be targeted with coordinated action, they commented.

They also called for a committed political effort for the financial reforms.

Ahsan H Mansur, the former IMF economist also believes that although government debt is rising, it is not alarming as of yet. ■

To strengthen the greenback, he emphasized on export diversification.

However, due to lower revenue collection, debt repayment capacity is decreasing.

Mansur feared it would create risks in the future. He urged raising the capacity of the National Board of Revenue (NBR) to increase revenue collection.

According to the latest data from the Bangladesh Bank, the country's foreign reserve stood at $21.05 billion.

Earlier Franziska Lieselotte Ohnsorge, chief economist, South Asia, World Bank Group, delivered the keynote presentation.

Regarding fiscal policy, Prof Selim Raihan of the Department of Economics, University of Dhaka, and executive director at Sanem, said "The next 2-3 months are very important for the country's economy. If no effective short-term plan is adopted within this period, considering the national election ahead, the situation will not be promising at all, it could even be worse."

The economist emphasized political commitment to economic reforms of the country.

Barrister Md Sameer Sattar, president, Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) also presented at the seminar.

BCCCI submits six proposals to commerce ministry

Business Outlook Report

Bangladesh China Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCCI) on September 10 submitted six proposals including establishment of Chinese bank branches in Bangladesh to the ministry of Commerce.

The chamber stated that establishment of Chinese bank branches will streamline trade settlements, lower transaction costs, and enhance financial connectivity between the two nations.

The proposals were submitted to the commerce secretary Md Ataur Rahman Khan while a delegation of BCCCI, led by its President Md Khorshed Alam, paid a courtesy call on him at the Secretariat in the capital.

The delegation also placed bonded warehouse misuse at the forefront of the discussion, saying the unauthorised sale of bonded goods in the local market is creating unfair competition and discouraging potential foreign investment, particularly from China.

The BCCCI called for stronger monitoring and enforcement to curb such practices and ensure a level playing field for compliant businesses and genuine investors.

Other proposals included establishing at least 20 permanent display centres for Bangladeshi products in China, increasing exports to the Chinese market, improving participation in major Chinese trade fairs, and expanding technical and vocational cooperation with China.

The delegation also shared observations from Bangladesh's participation in the 10th China-South Asia Expo in Kunming, highlighting opportunities to further promote Bangladeshi products and attract Chinese

It stated that the BCCCI represents over 850 members, including approximately 500 Chinese enterprises operating in Bangladesh established in 2003.

Han Jingchao, senior vice president, AZM Azizur Rahman, senior vice president, Jamilur Rahman, secretary general, and Md Abu Taher, executive director of BCCCI, were present at the meeting.

They said their aim fostering trade, investment, industrial cooperation, and sustainable economic partnerships between Bangladesh and China. ■

Opposition Proposes Crisis-Management Cell

Govt presents plan to resolve energy-power crisis

Business Outlook Report

The government September 8 rolled out a slew of measures to address the energy and power crises that has virtually crippled the country, especially affecting productive and business activities, as parliament took up the problem.

Some of these measures include establishing a land-based LNG terminal at Matarbari, which is expected to supply approximately 1,000 MMCFD gas, a third FSRU (floating storage and regasification unit) at Matarbari under a G-to-G agreement with China, to be completed within 18 months, a 620-megawatt coal-fired power plant using domestic coal at Barapukuria, and move for a 1,320-megawatt second phase of the Payra coal-fired power plant.

Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed outlined the mega-plan while taking part in discussion initiated by opposition leader Shafiqur Rahman, whose alliance has launched a movement on this and other issues.

Responding to the opposition's proposals, Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed assured parliament that no further capacity charge-payments made to power plants regardless of whether or not they generate electricity-would be paid.

The three new rental power companies approved by the government operate on a 'No Power, No Money' basis, he stated. There is no capacity charge involved.

The minister defended government actions, noting that an international fuel crisis triggered by the Middle East War emerged shortly after the current administration took office.

Despite this, fuel prices were not increased by even a single paisa until April 14 to protect farmers during the Boro season. Subsequent price adjustments were made only to curb smuggling, with no harmful impact on the economy or budget, he claimed.

Blaming previous government Launching a scathing attack on the previous administration, the Home Minister said The previous government built one power plant after another without ensuring where gas or fuel would come from.

Instead of exploring domestic gas reserves, they increased foreign dependency -- only to nurture their party's tycoons and looters through gas imports.

On the contentious issue of capacity charge, he said We inherited this capacity- charge system from the fascist Sheikh Hasina regime. However, the new rental power approvals given by the Prime Minister have no capacity charge attached.

No Immediate Cancellation of Existing Contracts Regarding cross-border electricity import, the minister explained the government's cautious approach We know that overpriced electricity was imported by wasting public money. But if we cancel those contracts now, the matter will go to international arbitration, and power supply will be halted. We are already in a power crisis-we cannot risk losing 1,600 megawatts at this moment. Running a state requires patience.

The Home Minister outlined several long-term initiatives that also include an LPG terminal and storage facility at Matarbari and major plans for renewable-energy-and wind-power projects

Our six-month timeframe is not for creating these problems but for the work we want to do to solve them, the minister clarified.

He acknowledges that it is not possible to overhaul the fragile banking and power system inherited from 17 years of misrule in just six months.

The Prime Minister has made it clear-the suffering people are enduring was not created by us; it is the result of the debris left behind by the previous government, Minister Ahmed concluded.

Earlier, the opposition offered to provide a team of technical experts to assist the government in resolving the country's severe energy and gas crises, without seeking any credit for their contribution, while simultaneously demanding a realistic and specific roadmap rather than mere assurances.

Speaking during a parliamentary discussion on his proposal titled Taking effective measures to prevent severe disruption to power generation due to acute energy and gas shortages, industrial closures leading to unemployment, and serious disaster to the national economy, Opposition Leader Dr Shafiqur Rahman highlighted the widening gap between government promises and on-the-ground reality.

We are hopeful about the government's steps. But confusion arises when we see that the open assurances given in parliament are not being implemented, Shafiqur Rahman stated.

He cited examples such as the continued collection of meter charges and demand charges despite pledges to abolish them, as well as the persistence of ghost bills that the government had promised to resolve. Unless accountability and transparency are ensured, no plan-however well-crafted-will succeed, he warns.

The opposition leader also decried what he described as daylight robbery of public funds through capacity charge in the power sector. We don't want to harm anyone, but this must be addressed. If the nation cannot break free from this vicious cycle, there will be no relief, he said.

Shafiqur Rahman noted that 80 per cent of Bangladesh's population lives in rural areas, and their lives have become unbearable due to prolonged outages.

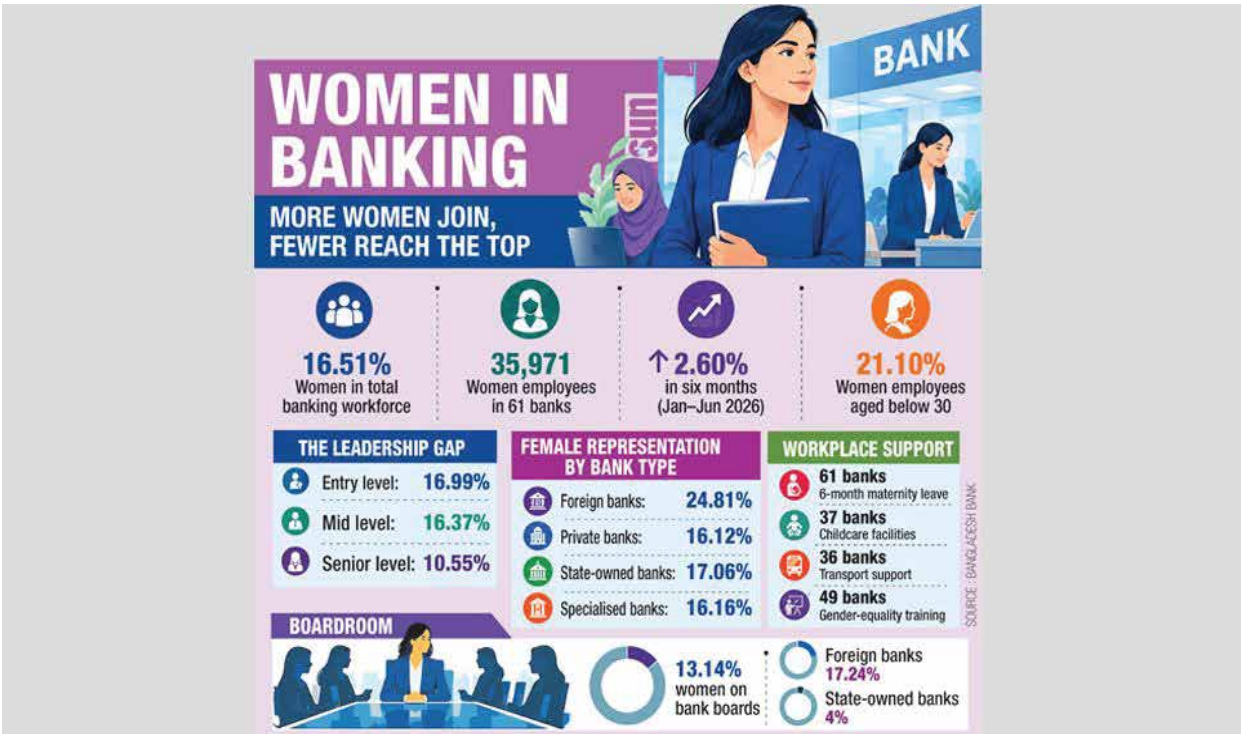
He urges the government to acknowledge the crisis openly rather than concealing it. Responsible people standing in this august parliament have said, 'There is no crisis!' Such ridiculous statements should not be used to mock the nation. We must tell the people what we have and what we don't, so the nation can mentally prepare, he said.

Criticizing the 'culture of flattery' in politics, Shafiqur Rahman remarked, We are inspired by the Prime Minister's simple lifestyle. But those who call him an icon do not follow him. We only see the reverse.

He further observed that under the previous fascist regime of Sheikh Hasina, everyone claimed the leader was holy while those around her were corrupt. Now that the leader has left, they say those around her were good and it was the leader who destroyed the country…, he stated.

Offering concrete cooperation to the government, the opposition leader proposed if the government seeks assistance, they can connect their technical expert team with them.

We can work together for the country and the people. There is no question of credit or discredit here. The government can take all the credit-we have no objection. We only want solutions. ■



More women enter banking few reach senior posts

Business Outlook Report

The banking profession, once widely viewed as a male-dominated career, is gradually becoming more attractive to women in Bangladesh, particularly among younger workers.

More women are entering banks at entry-level positions, while improved workplace facilities, maternity leave, childcare support and transportation arrangements are making it easier for them to pursue banking careers.

According to the latest Bangladesh Bank data, the number of women working in the country's 61 scheduled banks rose to 35,971 in January-June 2026, up 910, or 2.60%, from 35,061 in July-December 2025.

Women now account for 16.51% of the banking sector's total workforce of 217,818.

The growing participation of young women is particularly encouraging. During the period, women under 30 accounted for 21.10% of the female banking workforce, nearly twice the 11% share of women aged over 50.

For many young women, banking is increasingly seen not merely as a job but as a structured career offering professional growth, financial independence and opportunities to work in a corporate environment.

"Banking has become much more accessible and attractive to women than it was in the past. Young women now see it as a profession where they can build a long-term career while developing skills and financial independence," said Nusrat Jahan, an assistant director of Bangladesh Bank.

Private commercial banks employ the largest number of women in absolute terms.

The 43 private commercial banks employed 23,524 women, representing 16.12% of their total workforce. The six state-owned commercial banks employed 9,471 women, or 17.06% of their employees.

The three specialised banks employed 2,045 women, accounting for 16.16% of their workforce.

Foreign commercial banks had the smallest number of female employees, at 931, but recorded the highest proportion of women in their workforce at 24.81%.

The figures show that while private banks employ the largest number of women, foreign banks have a comparatively higher share of female employees.

Entry easier, climbing ladder remains difficult

While more women are entering banking, the data reveal a persistent challenge fewer women reach senior positions.

Women accounted for 16.99% of entry-level employees and 16.37% of mid-level employees. But their representation fell to just 10.55% at higher positions. This suggests that the challenge is no longer simply bringing women into banks. Retaining them and ensuring their progression into decision-making and leadership positions is becoming a bigger issue.

"The number of women entering banking is definitely increasing, but the real challenge is retaining them and ensuring their career progression.

Women need equal opportunities for promotion, leadership roles and professional development," said Fahmida Rahman, a joint director of Bangladesh Bank.

"Facilities such as maternity leave, childcare and transport make a significant difference. Without these support systems, many women may find it difficult to continue in a demanding profession like banking after marriage or motherhood," she added.

Banks have taken several measures to create more women-friendly workplaces.

According to the data, all scheduled banks provide six months of maternity leave for female employees and have policies to prevent and raise awareness about sexual harassment.

As many as 37 banks have established or joined childcare centres for employees' children, while 36 provide transportation for female employees travelling after designated working hours.

During January-June, 49 scheduled banks organised gender-equality awareness training for their employees.Such facilities are increasingly important in helping women balance professional responsibilities with family obligations.

Despite progress in workforce participation, women remain underrepresented at the highest levels of decision-making. During January-June, women accounted for only 13.14% of bank board members.

Foreign commercial banks recorded the highest female representation on their boards at 17.24%, while state-owned banks had the lowest at just 4%.

Industry insiders say banks need to focus not only on recruitment but also on creating transparent career paths for women.

Recruitment is only the first step; genuine gender equality will require ensuring women have equal opportunities to become branch heads, senior executives, managing directors and board members. ■

Govt inks $1.0b loan deal with IsDB for modernisation expansion of ERL

Business Outlook Report

The Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) on September 3 confirmed $1.0 billion in loans to enhance Bangladesh's oil-refining capacity three times, officials say. The loan agreement was signed between the Economic Relations Division (ERD) and IsDB in the capital on Thursday.

ERD Additional Secretary Dr Mohammad Mizanur Rahman and Director General, Country Programs, IsDB, Anasse Aissami inked the deal on behalf of the Bangladesh government and the Jeddah-based lender, respectively.

Bangladesh's Prime Minister Tarique Rahman and IsDB visiting President Dr Muhammad Al Jasser witnessed the signing ceremony. ■

Climate action must ensure decent work, inclusive growth: Experts

Business Outlook Report

Speakers on September 10 said climate action must ensure decent work, protect livelihoods and promote inclusive growth, calling for reliable, disaggregated data to identify vulnerable groups and better target social safety net programmes.

They also recommended for focusing on creating employment through green transition, requiring sector an occupation level mapping to identify where jobs will be generated or lost.

Thy made the remarks at a dialogue titled, Advancing Just Transition in Bangladesh, led by the Department of Environment (DoE) under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), with technical support from the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (SANEM), funded by Sweden through the ILO–Sida Global Partnership.

Mirza Shawkat, director of climate change and international convention ar DoE, Elisa Benistant Fremigacci, technical officer of Just transition at ILO, Dr Selim Raihan, professor of Economics at University of Dhaka and executive director of SANEM presented technical issues at the event.

According to the presentations, Bangladesh's "Just Transition" Chapter under its updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC 3.0) sets out 69 concrete, traceable activities across six sectors, backed by a combined $1.85 billion investment envelope.

The chapter was built on a cross-mapping of 14 national policy documents, including NDC 3.0, the National Adaptation Plan, the Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100, the 8th Five Year Plan and Perspective Plan 2041, identifying 258 aligned commitments that were distilled into 33 priority commitments.

These, in turn, anchor a consolidated action matrix of 69 activities spanning energy, transport, construction, agriculture, waste, and industrial processes and product use (IPPU), each with its own responsible institution, budget, timeframe and success measure.

Of the $1.85 billion envelope, $250.6 million represents direct cost covering training, grants and institutional strengthening, while $1,597.5 million reflects capital to be mobilised through commercial finance and development finance institutions such as IDCOL, rather than direct government spending.

The total envelope amounts to just 1.59% of the overall estimated cost of implementing NDC 3.0.

The chapter was shaped through six rounds of consultation between July and September, including a

technical webinar, inter-ministerial tripartite sessions, sector-specific and thematic consultations, and two validation webinars, engaging close to 200 counterparts from ministries, employers, workers, the private sector, civil society, youth and academia.

The National Alliance for Just Transition Bangladesh (NAJTB), representing workers across 17 sectors, and the Bangladesh Employers' Federation (BEF) were among the key counterparts consulted.

Shaikh Faridul Islam, state minister of environment, forest and climate change, Dr Md Saimum Parvez, special assistant to the prime minister (Environment), Mohammad Navid Saffiullah, additional secretary (Climate Change), Dr Md Lutfor Rahman, director general of Department of Environment (DoE), Abdur Rahim Khan, additional secretary of Labour Wing at MoLE spoke at the event.

Moustapha Kamal Gueye, director of Just Transition Priority Action Programme at ILO, Max Tunon, country director of ILO Bangladesh, Dr Fahmida Khatun, Fellow at CPD, Abul Bashar, executive director of sustainable finance at Bangladesh Bank, Farooq Ahmed, secretary-general of Bangladesh Employers' Federation (BEF), Md Shamsul Islam, deputy secretary and focal point of just transition at MoLE, and Mesbahuddin Ahmed, chairman of National Coordination Committee for Workers' Education (NCCWE), were present in the programme. ■

BB, Al-Arafah Islami Bank sign CMSME working capital refinance fund agreement

Business Outlook Report

With the aim of promoting employment generation and the development of the Cottage, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (CMSME) sector, Bangladesh Bank and Al-Arafah Islami Bank PLC have signed an agreement worth Tk5,000 crore to ensure working capital financing at affordable profit rates and on easy terms.

Under the revolving refinance scheme, the CMSME Working Capital Refinance Fund, businesses facing difficulties in maintaining their operations due to working capital shortages will be eligible to receive financing at a 9% profit rate.

The agreement signing ceremony was held at the head office of Bangladesh Bank on September 8.

Deputy governor of Bangladesh Bank Md Anis Ur Rahman attended the event as chief guest.

Among others present at the event were executive director of Bangladesh Bank Nahid Rahman, director of SME & Special Programs Department Md Zabdul Islam, additional director Shahanaj Parveen, senior vice president & head of SME business division of Al-Arafah Islami Bank Monirul Islam, and senior assistant vice president & head of agriculture business & refinance unit Sheikh Asadul Haque.

Financing under the refinance fund established by Bangladesh Bank is expected to further accelerate business activities in the CMSME sector, while contributing to increased production, new employment opportunities and greater contribution of the sector to the overall economic activities of the country. ■

The Citizens Bank PLC has formally launched its Islamic Banking operations under the brand name 'Citizens Islamic.' Chowdhury Mohammed Hanif Shoeb, Chairman of Citizens Bank PLC, formally inaugurated the Bank's Islamic Banking operations on September 14, 2026, marking a significant milestone in the Bank's journey to provide Shariah-compliant, ethical and customer-centric banking solutions, according to a press release. ■

Pubali Bank PLC. has joined the Tk3,000 crore 'Export Diversification Refinance Scheme' introduced by Bangladesh Bank with the objective of reducing the country's export dependence on the Ready-Made Garments (RMG) sector and promoting export diversification. ■

Community Bank Bangladesh PLC. celebrated its 7th anniversary with a commitment to moving towards new heights through transformation, growth and sustainability, following seven years of achievements and experiences. ■

Standard Islami Bank PLC has signed an agreement with Bangladesh Bank under a Tk 3,000 crore Refinance Scheme to support the development of an agriculture-based economic hub in North Bengal. ■

Prime Bank PLC has signed a participation agreement with Bangladesh Bank to join its Tk5,000 crore Working Capital Refinance Fund for the CMSME sector, aimed at providing working capital financing to eligible CMSME enterprises at affordable interest rates and on easier terms. ■

Southeast Bank PLC recently inks deal for participating in Bangladesh Bank's Tk 5,000 crore Working Capital Refinance Fund for CMSME to promote employment generation and foster sustainable development. Under the scheme, Southeast Bank will facilitate working capital financing at preferential rate to eligible CMSMEs to enable them to operate at full capacity. ■

United Commercial Bank PLC (UCB) and Chartered Life Insurance Company PLC have signed an agreement to enable the convenient, secure, and seamless collection of insurance premiums and admissible fees through UCB's digital and physical distribution channels. ■

Bank Asia PLC organized a day-long training program titled "Your Guide to Income Tax Return Filing" with the aim of enhancing employees' knowledge and practical skills in income tax return filing, tax compliance and relevant regulatory requirements. ■

Third Executive Committee Meeting of the Board of Directors of Sammilito Islami Bank PLC, a state-owned Shariah-based bank, was held recently (13 September 2026) at its head office. Chairman of the Board of Directors of the bank, Quazi Shairul Hassan, presided over the meeting. ■

Commercial Bank of Ceylon PLC (CBC) Bangladesh Operations and Ascent Health Ltd. have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to provide exclusive healthcare benefits to CBC Visa cardholders and the bank's employees. ■

467th board meeting of Al-Arafah Islami Bank PLC was held on Tuesday, September 15, 2026, at the Bank's Head Office. Chairman of the Board of Directors, Badiur Rahman, presided over the meeting. The overall business performance of the Bank was reviewed, and several policy decisions were taken at the meeting. ■

ShareTrip has joined the 12th edition of Monitor Airline of the Year as the title sponsor. The annual awards, organized by The Bangladesh Monitor, is the country's only airline recognition program. The title sponsorship was formalized through the signing of a MoU by Kazi Wahidul Alam, editor of The Bangladesh Monitor, and Sadia Haque, co-founder and CEO of ShareTrip Limited, at a ceremony held at Crowne Plaza Dhaka Airport on September 10. ■

NCC Bank donates Tk1cr to Dhaka Community Hospital

Business Outlook Report

Under its CSR program, NCC Bank has donated Tk1 crore to Dhaka Community Hospital (DCH) for the purchase of a state-of-the-art CT scan machine.

This initiative will expedite diagnosis and treatment, particularly for trauma, stroke, emergency, and cancer patients, while also expanding access to affordable healthcare.

This 500-bed non-profit hospital has long been providing affordable healthcare to low-income and underprivileged communities.

Currently lacking its own high-resolution CT scan facility, the hospital faced certain limitations in patient care.

To address this gap, NCC Bank has provided this financial assistance from its CSR fund.

Recently, at an event held at NCC Bank head office, chairman of the bank Md Nurun Newaz Salim handed over a cheque for Tk1 crore to chairman (acting) of the DCH Trust Quazi Habibur Rahman.

Among others, NCC Bank vice chairman Engineer Abdus Salam, chairman of the executive committee Khairul Alam Chaklader, directors Syed Asif Nizamuddin, Mohammed Sazzad Un Newaz and Morshedul Alam Chaklader, managing director M Shamsul Arefin, additional managing director M Khurshed Alam, deputy managing director Md Habibur Rahman, and company secretary (current charge) Md Nazrul Islam Chowdhury, along with executive & director of DCH Trust Prof Dr Md Omar Sharif Ibne Hasan, members of DCH Trust Sukumar Chakrabortty, Md Jabed Yousuf, Md Wakar Hossain, assistant director Dr Md Fuadul Islam, and member Md Ariful Islam were present.

NCC Bank chairman Md Nurun Newaz Salim said Ensuring affordable and accessible healthcare is an essential part of our commitment to society. The installation of this high-capacity CT scan machine at Dhaka Community Hospital will enable patients to receive rapid diagnosis and treatment, while also alleviating some of the financial burden on them and their families.

The bank's managing director M

Shamsul Arefin said One of the key objectives of NCC Bank's CSR initiatives is to ensure healthcare for low-income and underprivileged people, especially those suffering from critical illnesses. Today's assistance aims to enhance the diagnostic capabilities of Dhaka Community Hospital and help deliver essential healthcare to more people at an affordable cost.

Quazi Habibur Rhaman, acting chairman of the Dhaka Community Hospital Trust, expressed his gratitude to NCC Bank, saying Starting with just 20 beds, Dhaka Community Hospital has now grown into a 500-bed healthcare facility. We remain committed to serving those who cannot afford expensive treatments. This support from NCC Bank will fill a crucial gap in our diagnostic services, enabling us to provide essential CT scan services more efficiently and cost-effectively. ■

Apparel exports to US drop 6.5% as overall market shrinks

Business Outlook Report

Bangladesh's readymade garment (RMG) shipments to the United States fell 6.5% during the first seven months (January–July) of 2026, reaching $4.66 billion, down from $4.98 billion in the same period last year.

Official data from the Office of Textiles and Apparel (Otexa) released on Saturday (September 5) shows that the slowdown reflects a broader market contraction in the US, where total apparel imports dropped 8.65% year-on-year to $41.83 billion.

The export decline accelerated in July, with monthly Bangladeshi garment sales to the US plunging 10.73%.

Despite the drop in revenue, volume, and unit price, Bangladesh weathered the US market contraction better than major regional competitors like China and India, which saw drastic export slumps exceeding 25% to 34%.

Total US garment import value fell 8.65% to $41.83 billion, while import volume dropped 9.41%. Average unit prices across all sourcing origins edged up slightly by 0.84%.

Export volume from Bangladesh fell 4.34%, while the average unit price decreased by 2.26%, pulling total earnings down to $4.66 billion.

Monthly export revenue from Bangladesh to the US dropped by 10.73% in July, signaling weakening short-term momentum.

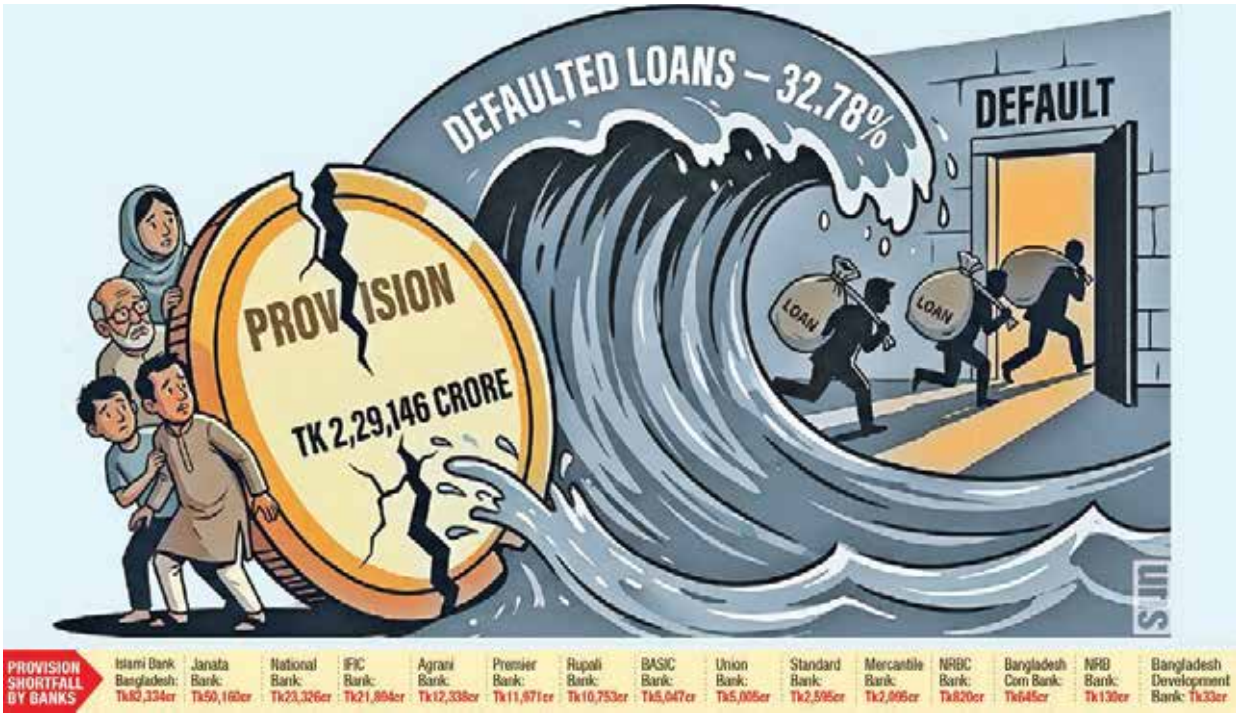
China and India experienced deep market contractions in the US, declining 34.21% and 25.77% in value, respectively.

Cambodia (+10.48%) and Indonesia (+2.76%) bucked the downward trend, expanding both export value and volume in the US market.

The US apparel market is going through an overall contraction, noted Mohiuddin Rubel, founder and CEO of Bangladesh Apparel Voice (BAV). fWhile Bangladesh is in a relatively better position in terms of export value compared to China and India, the accelerated drop in July requires close monitoring and strategic adjustment.

Industry observers emphasize that domestic exporters must look beyond low-value high-volume items to offset falling global demand.

Expanding into high-value functional garments, diversifying into non-US markets, and improving lead times remain critical to maintaining Bangladesh's global market share. ■



Defaults push 15 banks' provision gap to record Tk2.29 lakh crore

Business Outlook Report

A relentless rise in defaulted loans has pushed the combined provision shortfall at 15 state-owned and private banks to Tk2,29,146 crore as of end-June, the highest figure in the country's banking history, according to Bangladesh Bank data.

The record gap reflects years of loan fraud, money laundering and unrecovered lending disbursed under various names, with banks now unable to set aside adequate provisions against the mounting bad debt even as their income declines.

Central bank figures show total outstanding loans in the banking sector stood at Tk18,50,595 crore at end-June, of which Tk6,06,555 crore, or 32.78%, was classified as defaulted. A substantial portion of these defaulted loans is considered unlikely to be recovered.

Banks are required to hold provisions against loans according to their quality 0.25% to 5% for regular loans, 20% for substandard loans, 50% for doubtful loans and 100% for bad or loss loans.

Dr Zahid Hossain, former lead economist at the World Bank's Dhaka office, attributed the sector's predicament primarily to the rapid rise in defaulted loans and policy leniency by the central bank.

"The fundamental problem is defaulted loans. If there were no defaulted loans, there would be no provision shortfall," he told the Daily Sun.

He said repeated policy concessions for loan defaulters, together with allowing banks to pay dividends despite provision shortfalls, were sending the wrong message to the sector, and warned this could put depositors' money at serious risk.

He called for the immediate withdrawal of such policies and tougher measures to recover defaulted loans.

Mustafa K Mujeri, former chief economist of Bangladesh Bank, said banks with higher non-performing loan ratios were particularly vulnerable because their operating income was no longer sufficient to meet three obligations simultaneously paying interest to depositors, covering operating expenses and maintaining mandatory provisions.

He attributed the widening shortfall

to weak recovery of defaulted loans, prolonged leniency towards large borrowers, and the long-standing practice of repeatedly rescheduling and writing off loans.

"If this continues, depositor confidence will inevitably be undermined, posing a serious threat to financial stability," he told the Daily Sun.

State-owned banks under severe strain

Five state-owned banks together recorded a provision shortfall of Tk78,330 crore. Janata Bank accounted for the largest share, at Tk50,160 crore, followed by Agrani Bank (Tk12,338 crore), Rupali Bank (Tk10,753 crore) and BASIC Bank (Tk5,047 crore). Bangladesh Development Bank's shortfall stood at around Tk33 crore.

The absence of adequate provisions and financial buffers is weakening the capital base of these banks and raising concerns about their capacity to protect depositors' funds.

Private banks also face massive deficits

Ten private banks together recorded a provision shortfall of more than Tk1.50 lakh crore. Islami Bank Bangladesh recorded by far the largest deficit, at Tk82,334 crore, followed by National Bank (Tk23,326 crore) and IFIC Bank (Tk21,894 crore).

The remaining banks on the list were Premier Bank (Tk11,971 crore), Union Bank (Tk5,005 crore), Standard Bank (Tk2,595 crore), Mercantile Bank (Tk2,095 crore), Bangladesh Commerce Bank (Tk645 crore), NRBC Bank (Tk820 crore) and NRB Bank (Tk130 crore).

The scale of these deficits has raised concerns about the stability and resilience of the private banking sector. ■

UKEF offers up to £2bn financing for Bangladesh projects

Business Outlook Report

UK Export Finance (UKEF) has offered financing support of up to £2 billion for eligible projects in Bangladesh involving British goods and services, particularly in key development and infrastructure sectors. The UK government's export credit agency has an available country capacity of between £1 billion and £2 billion and can support projects in transport, agriculture, healthcare, airports, manufacturing, renewable energy and infrastructure, according to a press release issued by the International Chamber of Commerce, Bangladesh (ICCB) on September 3.A UKEF delegation discussed potential cooperation and opportunities to mobilise UK-backed financing during a meeting with ICCB President Mahbubur Rahman and members of its Executive Board at the ICCB Secretariat in Dhaka. Mahbubur Rahman highlighted Bangladesh's growing infrastructure requirements and expanding private sector, saying these offer significant opportunities for greater UK investment, technology and long-term financing. He identified renewable energy, transport and logistics, airports and aviation, healthcare, agriculture and agro-processing, and climate-resilient infrastructure as priority areas for UKEF support. He also expressed ICCB's interest in working with UKEF, the UK Department for Business and Trade and British businesses to develop a concrete pipeline of viable projects that could benefit from British expertise and financing.Bangladesh market report. During the meeting, the UKEF delegation briefed ICCB members on its financing facilities, including guarantees, loans and insurance designed to help eligible projects secure competitive funding. ■

Govt recommends LNG purchase holds back fuel deals

Business Outlook Report

The Cabinet Committee on Government Purchase has recommended the approval of a proposal to directly purchase liquefied natural gas (LNG) from TotalEnergies to meet the country's energy demand.

However, the committee withheld final approval for five proposals to procure diesel, Jet A-1 and furnace oil for September-December 2026, directing the authorities to negotiate with the recommended bidders over proposed premiums and base prices before finalising the deals.

The decisions were taken at a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Government Purchase at the Secretariat on September 9, chaired by Finance Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury.

The committee recommended the proposal to purchase LNG directly from TotalEnergies at a price linked to the international Japan Korea Marker (JKM). Under the proposal, the price of each unit of LNG will be determined by adding $0.06 to the JKM price.

Meanwhile, the government proposed purchasing diesel, Jet A-1 and furnace oil through international open tenders under five packages for September-December 2026.

The five packages have a combined estimated procurement cost of around Tk11,914 crore.

The committee did not give final approval to any of the five packages. Instead, it directed the authorities to negotiate with the recommended suppliers on the proposed premium and base prices and place the negotiated prices before the committee at its next meeting.

Under the package PG-01, the government proposed purchasing between 2.20 lakh and 2.50 lakh tonnes of diesel and 50,000 tonnes of Jet A-1, at an estimated cost of Tk4,803.02 crore. Trafigura Pte Ltd has been recommended as the supplier for the package.

The proposal under package PG-02 involves purchasing between 2 lakh and 2.30 lakh tonnes of diesel and 40,000 tonnes of Jet A-1, with an estimated cost of Tk4,326.89 crore. Vitol Asia Pte Ltd has been recommended for the package.

Under PG-03, the government proposed purchasing between 25,000 and 50,000 tonnes of diesel at an estimated cost of Tk792.79 crore. Unipac Singapore Pte Ltd has been recommended as the supplier.

As per the proposal in PG-04, between 50,000 and 75,000 tonnes of diesel would be purchased at an

estimated cost of Tk1,189.87 crore. Vitol Asia Pte Ltd has again been recommended as the supplier.

Under the package PG-05, the proposal is to purchase between 75,000 and 1 lakh tonnes of furnace oil, with an estimated cost of Tk801.47 crore. Trafigura Pte Ltd has been recommended for the package.

Government to buy 9,000 tonnes of chickpeas

The committee also recommended the purchase of 9,000 tonnes of chickpeas through an international open tender at a total cost of Tk76.21 crore. Including VAT and taxes, the price of chickpeas will be Tk84.67 per kg.

Australian company Aust-Grain Exports, based in Horsham, Victoria, has been recommended to supply the chickpeas.

One crore litres of rice bran oil

The government has also recommended the purchase of one crore litres of refined rice bran oil in two-litre PET bottles through a local open tender.

The total procurement cost will be Tk181.50 crore, with the price, including VAT and taxes, set at Tk181.50 per litre.

Four companies have been recommended to supply the oil.

Green Oil and Poultry Feed Industries will supply 20 lakh litres, Pradhan Oil Mills Ltd 20 lakh litres, Majumdar Bran Oil Mills Ltd 30 lakh litres and Majumdar Products Ltd 30 lakh litres.

According to the proposal, Majumdar Products Ltd's portion will be worth Tk54.45 crore. The value of the supplies from the other three companies will be determined according to their recommended quantities and tendered prices. ■

NRB Bank, BB to offer working capital financing at 9% interest for CMSMES

Business Outlook Report

A participation agreement has been signed between Bangladesh Bank and NRB Bank PLC to disburse loans at low interest rates and on easy terms from the Tk5,000 crore working capital refinance fund for the CMSME sector.

The agreement signing ceremony was held on September 8, at Bangladesh Bank's head office.

Md Zabdul Islam, director of the SME and Special Programs Department (SMESPD) of Bangladesh Bank, and Tarek Reaz Khan, managing director & CEO of NRB Bank PLC, signed the agreement on behalf of their respective institutions.

Md Anis Ur Rahman, deputy governor of Bangladesh Bank, attended the event as chief guest.

Nahid Rahman, executive director of Bangladesh Bank; Shahanaj Pervin, additional director; and Md Aminul Islam, head of the SME Division of NRB Bank PLC, were also present.

Under the Tk 60,000 crore stimulus package announced by Bangladesh Bank, this fund was formed to enable CMSME enterprises to operate their production, service, and business activities at full capacity by providing them with the necessary working capital loans investments, and to boost the sluggish economy by creating direct and indirect employment in the country.

Under this fund, generally operational CMSME enterprises that are unable to run their production service business activities at full capacity due to a lack of necessary working capital will receive financing at an interest rate of only 9%.

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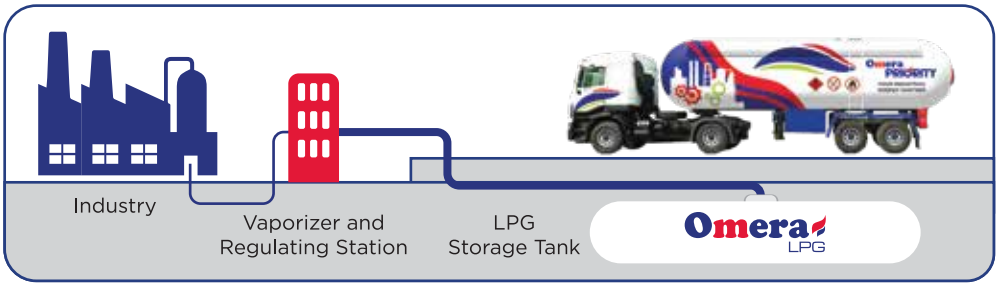

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Mobil House, CWS (A) 13/A, Bir Uttam Mir Shawkat Sarak, Gulshan Avenue, Dhaka - 1212, Bangladesh