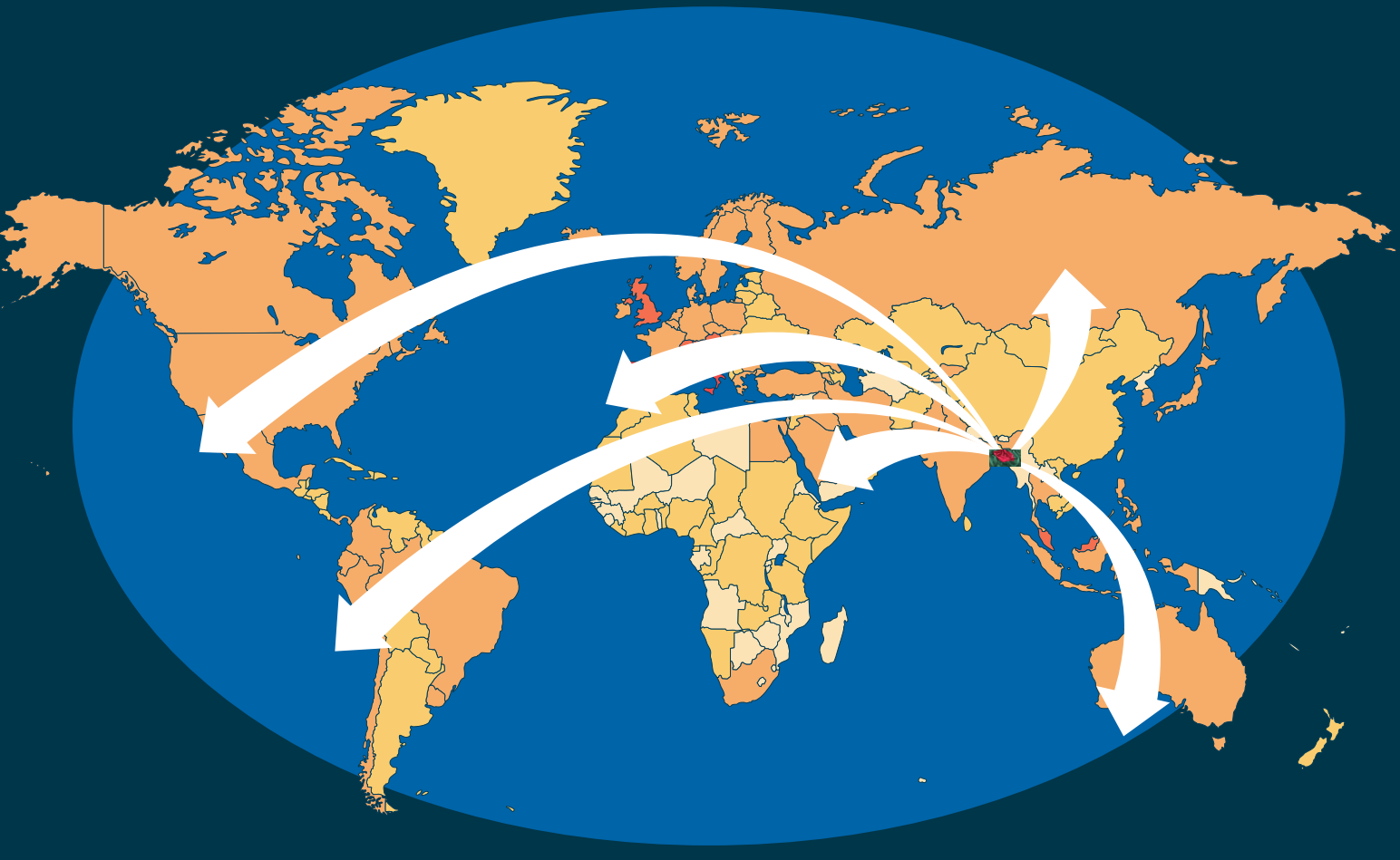
ICC Bangladesh

NEWS BULLETIN

We make business work for everyone, everyday, everywhere

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New Hopes, Old Hurdles: BIMSTEC's Next Chapter

About ICC Bangladesh

International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), The world business organization, founded in 1919 in the aftermath of the First World War when no world system of rules governed trade, investment, finance or commercial relations. ICC has its physical presence in more than 170 countries representing 45 million companies and more than 1 billion workers worldwide. Globally, one in every three worker depends on ICC Members for their livelihood. ICC's founders, referred to as "The Merchants of Peace", acted on their conviction that building stronger trade relations between nations would reduce the risk of war and armed conflict.

ICC works in close cooperation with national governments and multi-national institutions such as G-8/G-20, World Bank, WTO, Asian Development Bank, UNCTAD, OECD and several UN agencies for promotion, protection and development of world economy. ICC, is the only private sector non-sovereign organization, which was granted Status of a Permanent Observer at the General Assembly of the United Nations in December 2016.

Bangladesh National Committee of ICC, founded in 1994, is comprised of trade organizations, national and trans-national corporations, who represent almost 80% Bangladesh economy. The activities of ICC Bangladesh include promotion of foreign trade and investment, trade policy reviews, dialogues, seminars & workshops both at home and abroad on related policy issues, harmonization of trade law & rules, legal reforms, updating ICC rules & standards for cross border business transactions. ICC Bangladesh has so far organized following regional, international conferences & dialogue:

- 10-11 November 2000: ICC Asia Conference on "Investment in Developing Countries: Increasing Opportunities" organized in Dhaka was inaugurated by the Prime Minister of Bangladesh and attended by a number of high profile dignitaries including the Thai Deputy Prime Minister & WTO Director General, ADB President, UN-ESCAP Executive Secretary and Ministers. More than 250 participants from 24 countries participated in this event.
- 17-18 January 2004: International Conference on "Global Economic Governance and Challenges of Multilateralism" was held in Dhaka, coinciding with 10th Anniversary of ICC Bangladesh. The Conference was inaugurated by the Prime Minister of Bangladesh and Thai Prime Minister was the Keynote Speaker. WTO Director General, EU Commissioner for Trade, UNESCAP Executive Secretary, Governor of Japan Bank for International Cooperation, Ministers from three continents, ICC Chairman, Vice Chairman & Secretary General and more than 500 participants from 38 countries attended this event.
- 27-28 September 2005: Regional Seminar on "Capital Market Development: Asian Experience". The Seminar held in Dhaka was inaugurated by the President of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and attended by Chairmen/CEOs of securities & exchange commissions, stock exchanges, capital market operators, financial institutions and investors from 15 Asian countries.
- 13 April 2010: Conference on "Energy for Growth" was held in Dhaka coinciding with the 15 years of ICC's presence in Bangladesh. The Conference was inaugurated by the Finance Minister of Bangladesh and attended by ICC Global Chairman, Minister for Commerce of Bangladesh and Minister for Development Cooperation of Denmark. Some 800 delegates from home and abroad including energy experts and international financiers from Australia, China, Denmark, India, Germany, Japan, Singapore, Switzerland, UK and USA attended the event.
- 25-26 October 2014: International Conference on "Global Economic Recovery: Asian Perspective", was held in Dhaka coinciding with the 20 years of ICC's presence in Bangladesh. The Conference was inaugurated by the President of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. Finance and Commerce Ministers of Bangladesh, UNCTAD Secretary General, Ministers from Myanmar and Nepal; ICC Vice Chairman and Secretary General and ICC Research Foundation Chairman and more than 500 participants attended the event.
- 8-9 February 2017: The first ever "UNESCAP Asia Pacific Business Forum: Regional Integration to Achieve Sustainable Development" was organized by ICC Bangladesh jointly with UNESCAP under the patronage of the Ministry of Commerce of Bangladesh. The Forum was inaugurated by the President of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. Ministers from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, UNESCAP Secretary General, business leaders and some 600 delegates from home and abroad attended the Forum.
- 10-12 December 2019: "The Asia Pacific Conference on Financing inclusive and Sustainable Development" was organized by ICC Bangladesh jointly with UNESCAP, ADB and LIBF (The London Institute of Banking & Finance) under the patronage of the Financial Institutions Division Ministry of Finance of Bangladesh to celebrate 100 years of ICC and 25 years of ICC Bangladesh. The President of the People's Republic of Bangladesh inaugurated the Conference. UN Secretary General Mr. António Guterres and 8th UN Secretary General Mr. Ban-Ki moon also addressed through video during the inauguration. Ministers from Bangladesh, Cambodia, Maldives and Sri Lanka and UN ESCAP Executive Secretary, Central Bank Governors, Business Leaders, Experts and some 800 delegates from home and 30 foreign countries attended the Conference.
- 12 September 2024: "The First National Business Dialogue" in the Interim Government's regime was organized by ICC Bangladesh in association with 15 Major National Trade Organizations in Dhaka. Chief Advisor of the Interim Government Nobel Laureate Prof. Dr. Muhammad Yunus addressed the Dialogue as Chief Guest. Dr. Salehuddin Ahmed, Adviser In-Charge of the Ministries of Finance, Commerce, Science & Technology and Prof. Dr. Wahiduddin Mahmud, Adviser In-Charge of the Ministries of Planning and Education were Special Guests. Around 700 delegates, including top business leaders, bankers, representatives of international organizations and private- sector representatives attended the event.

As part of its activities, ICC Bangladesh has been organizing Workshops/ Seminars on International Trade Finance, mainly for bankers, within Bangladesh and in various countries. Since 2014, ICC Bangladesh, jointly with National Committees and Chambers, has organized workshops in Kuala Lumpur (April 2014); in Colombo (February 2015); in Kunming (August 2015); in Yangon (November 2015); in Hanoi (April 2016); in Bangkok (December 2017) and in Phnom Penh (April 2018).

The National Committee also arranged participation of Bankers from Bangladesh at ICC Annual Banking Commission Meetings in Singapore (April 2015), in Jakarta (April 2017) and in Beijing (April 2019); ICC Austria Global Trade Conference in Vienna (May 2017, June 2018 and May 2019); FCI Annual Meeting in Vietnam (June 2019); ICC Academy 8th Supply Chain Summit in Singapore (February 2019); International Financial Crime Forum in Kuala Lumpur (July 2019); LIBF World Conference on Banking Institutions (WCBI) in London (September 2019); ICC Global Trade Facilitation Summits in Dubai (March 2022 and April 2024) and ICC Court Centenary held virtually in March 2023.

For professional development of bankers, ICC Bangladesh also organizes Certified Documentary Credit Specialist (CDCS) and Certificate for Specialists in Demand Guarantees (CSDG) Examinations in Dhaka, conducted worldwide every year by LIBF (London Institute of Banking and Finance) and endorsed by ICC Paris.

ICC Bangladesh participates at World Chambers Congress, World Chambers Federation (WCF), ICC World Council, WTO Ministerial Meetings, Meetings of ICC Permanent Heads, ICC Banking Commission and ICC Asia Pacific Regional Consultative Group Meetings. The National Committee also organizes visits for Bangladeshi business delegations to various countries to promote trade and investment.

International Chamber of Commerce

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ICC Bangladesh
The world business organization

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Editor's Note

BIMSTEC's Turning Point: Bangladesh Leads

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), which was founded on 6 June 1997. With the signing of the Bangkok Declaration during the 6th BIMSTEC Summit held in Bangkok on April 4, 2025, the member countries adopted a major new plan called the "Bangkok Vision 2030." This plan aims to guide the region's development in a structured way and supports global goals like the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as Thailand's eco-friendly Bio-Circular-Green (BCG) economic model.

At the 6th Summit, Bangladesh assumed the chairmanship for the 2025–27 term. This provides Bangladesh with a stronger voice—not just in BIMSTEC but also in broader regional politics. This leadership role allows Bangladesh to push forward the implementation of the Bangkok Vision 2030, helping both Bangladesh and the wider region to work more closely together.

Connectivity is central to BIMSTEC's strategic agenda, especially under the Bangkok Vision 2030. A key priority is fast-tracking the BIMSTEC Master Plan for Transport Connectivity (2018–2028), which includes 267 infrastructure projects. Notable among them are the India–Myanmar–Thailand Trilateral Highway and the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project. Both are crucial for seamless overland and maritime links between South and Southeast Asia, reflecting growing political commitment among member states.

As the host of the BIMSTEC Permanent Secretariat and the current chair of the organization, Bangladesh is well-positioned to lead important development initiatives. This includes accelerating transport projects such as roads, ports, and trade routes—particularly maritime routes. The Bangkok Summit showed strong interest in improving maritime transport, which is a promising step toward resolving trade and shipping challenges in the region. However, the success of these plans will depend on the political stability and commitment of member countries. For example, the ongoing crisis in Myanmar remains a significant challenge to regional cooperation.

Trade between BIMSTEC countries is still relatively low—only about 7% of their total trade happens within the group. In comparison, ASEAN countries trade about 25% with each other. One major reason for this limited trade is the delay in signing a Free Trade Agreement (FTA), which has been under discussion since 2004. Progress has been slow, largely due to non-tariff barriers, the protection of sensitive products, and the reluctance of some countries to open their markets. The Bangkok Vision 2030 aims to accelerate the FTA process, but progress remains slow and uneven.

As the current chair of BIMSTEC, Bangladesh needs to focus on boosting trade among member countries. It can facilitate trade by easing visa rules, improving customs systems, and supporting digital payments. For Bangladesh, stronger ties within BIMSTEC could bring many benefits. Bangladeshi businesses—especially in garments, agriculture, pharmaceuticals, and light industries—could enjoy lower trade costs and better access to regional markets. Additionally, foreign companies might become more interested in investing in Bangladesh, particularly in infrastructure, energy, and digital technology, if there are clear and stable regional trade rules in place. This would benefit not only Bangladesh but the entire region.

Despite 25 years of operation, BIMSTEC still faces major challenges. Key transport projects are delayed. In Bangladesh, political uncertainty and occasional tensions with India hinder regional cooperation. Myanmar's ongoing unrest further complicates progress, making it difficult to develop crucial transport links and raising concerns about the group's cohesion.

According to industry insiders, intra-regional trade among BIMSTEC countries exceeds US$40 billion, while the potential trade opportunity among BIMSTEC nations could be as high as US$250 billion.

The BIMSTEC Trade Facilitation Strategic Framework 2030, developed by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), is an important initiative to advance trade facilitation among member states. During its two-year leadership, Bangladesh has the opportunity to persuade member countries to implement the ADB Framework 2023.

ICC Bangladesh News

ICC-ADB Seminar on
Economic Corridor and Logistics Development in Bangladesh: Investment Opportunities

ICC Bangladesh, jointly with ADB, organized a seminar on *Economic Corridor and Logistics Development in Bangladesh: Investment Opportunities* in Dhaka on 26 May. Planning Adviser Prof. Dr. Wahiduddin Mahmud attended as Chief Guest, and Special Assistant to the Chief Adviser Dr. Anisuzzaman Chowdhury was present as Special Guest.

Dr. Anisuzzaman Chowdhury, Special Assistant at the Ministry of Finance, emphasized the need to prioritize two to three key sectors—such as pharmaceuticals and electronics—to diversify the country's export basket urgently.

In his opening remarks, ADB Country Director Hoe Yun Jeong highlighted that Bangladesh's logistics sector faces significant structural challenges, including over-reliance on road transport, congestion, high costs, and insufficient multimodal infrastructure, which hinder export-oriented manufacturing. "This is where logistics sector development is crucial, apart from corridor development," he stated.

He emphasized the need for regulatory reforms, digitized customs processes, and strategic partnerships with regional and multilateral institutions—particularly ADB—to position Bangladesh as a key player in South Asia's evolving trade landscape. "ICC Bangladesh stands ready to support this agenda," he added, highlighting the institution's role in bridging the private sector with the global policy community.



Prof. Dr. Wahiduddin Mahmud (5th from left), Planning Adviser speaking as Chief Guest at the ***ICC-ADB Seminar on Economic Corridor and Logistics Development in Bangladesh*** *held in Dhaka on Monday May 26. ICC Bangladesh President Mahbubur Rahman (6th from left) Chaired and moderated the Seminar which was also addressed by Dr. Anisuzzaman Chowdhury (5th from right), Special Assistant, Ministry of Finance &ADB Country Director Hoe Yun Jeong (6th from right)and Sabyasachi Mitra (4th from left), Senior Logistics and Economic Corridor Expert (Former Director, SARD), ADB was the Key-note Speaker. The panel Speakers (R-L) were : SANEM Executive Director Prof. Dr. Selim Raihan; HSBC CEO Md. Mahbub Ur Rahman; ERD ADB Wing Chief S M Jakaria Huq; FNCCI Director General Gokarna Raj Awasthi; ICCB Executive Board Member Mir Nasir Hossain; MTB CEO Syed Mahbubur Rahman and ICCB Secretary General Ataur Rahman.*

Prof. Dr. Wahiduddin Mahmud stated that neighboring countries, especially the North-Eastern states of India, could benefit from Bangladesh's economic corridor, which connects ports and economic zones through rail, road, and waterways. He noted that Bangladesh could import raw materials from these states and export finished goods back to them and beyond. He also remarked that the interim government cannot initiate new development projects, as all allocations are earmarked for projects taken up by the previous government.

ICC Bangladesh President Mahbubur Rahman chaired and moderated the seminar. In his concluding remarks, he said, "The case for economic corridor development is no longer inspirational—it is urgent, evidence-based, and actionable."

Mr. Sabyasachi Mitra, Senior Logistics and Economic Corridor Expert (Former Director, SARD, ADB), presented the concept and development of economic corridors in Bangladesh, focusing on integrated strategies involving both central and local governments. He emphasized areas such as land acquisition policies, skill development, and tech-driven solutions. Drawing from ADB-supported projects and international experiences, including Malaysia and South

Korea, he outlined successful governance models. He also showcased the NW–Dhaka–SE corridor, highlighting its multimodal transport network, industrial zones, and growth centers. Proposed interventions include enhanced transport links, logistics parks, tourism promotion, and sustainable financing models, including private sector participation.

Mr. Barun Kumar Dey, Senior Economics Officer, ADB, stated that while Bangladesh's impressive growth—led by the RMG sector—has positioned it for LDC graduation, diversification beyond apparel is crucial. Although poverty has declined and the industrial and service sectors have grown, export concentration and high logistics costs remain challenges. He emphasized the importance of trade capacity, macroeconomic management, infrastructure upgrades, and transition from input-led to productivity-led growth for long-term resilience.

Mr. Mohammad Nazrul Islam, Senior Transport Specialist, highlighted efforts to enhance connectivity along the Northwest–Dhaka–Southeast corridor to promote trade and economic growth. Key initiatives include highway and railway upgrades, port improvements, intelligent transport systems, border gateways, inland waterways, and multimodal logistics hubs. He also mentioned regional connectivity goals, including for landlocked neighbors, and shared insights from the Philippines' South Commuter Railway project, which reduces congestion, improves transit, and supports climate goals.

In the seminar the Panel speakers were Mr. Md. Mahbub Ur Rahman, CEO, HSBC Bangladesh; Syed Mahbubur Rahman, Managing Director & CEO, Mutual Trust Bank PLC; Mr. Mir Nasir Hossain, Executive Board Member, ICC Bangladesh & MD, Mir Akhter Hossain Ltd; Mr. Gokarna Raj Awasthi, DG, FNCCI (Nepal) & Prof. Dr. Selim Raihan, Executive Director, SANEM.

Speakers called for accelerated institutional reforms and increased private investment to unlock the economic corridor's potential. They stressed the urgency of advancing logistics modernization and corridor development to ensure inclusive, regionally balanced growth.

The meeting was attended by ICCB Executive Board Members Abdul Hai Sarker, Anwar-Ul-Alam Chowdhury (Parvez), and Simeen Rahman; Osama Taser, Former DCCI President as well as High Commissioners, Ambassadors, and senior diplomats. Representatives from the UN, World Bank, UNDP, IFC, and JICA, along with CEOs and senior officials from national and multinational companies, were also present. The event was widely covered by both print and electronic media.

Other notable attendees included H.E. Haji Haris Bin Othman, High Commissioner, Brunei Darussalam; Ataur Rahman, Secretary General, ICCB; Engr. Rabiul Alam, CIP, Chairman, Energypac Power Generation Ltd.; Md. Mustafizur Rahman, Managing Director, Duncan Brothers (Bangladesh) Ltd.; Mohammad Salim, MD & CEO, Eastland Insurance PLC; SM Moinul Islam, MD, Tyser Risk Management Bangladesh Ltd.; Mr. Shahab Uddin Khan, President, Korea-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce & Industry; M. Jamal Uddin, CEO & MD, IDLC Finance PLC; Khawaja Manzur Nadeem, MD & CEO, United Insurance Co. Ltd.; Shabbir A. Khan, President, Bangladesh-Malaysia Chamber of Commerce & Industry; Ms. Humaira Azam, MD, Lanka Bangla Finance; M. Maksud, MD, Corona International; Ms. Faria Farhana Mahmud, Country Representative, Zhejiang Chouzhou Commercial Bank; Al Fattah Md. Masudur Rahman, Addl. DG (Infrastructure), Bangladesh Railway; Md. Abdur Rouf, Addl. Secretary, Socio-Economic Infrastructure Division, Ministry of Planning; Ms. Tahera Ahsan, Executive Director, Japan-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce & Industry.

ICC Dialogue on Global Financial Trends & Reforms: Implications for Bangladesh

ICC Bangladesh organized a Dialogue on "Global Financial Trends & Reforms: Implications for Bangladesh" in Dhaka on 30 April. ICC Global Banking Commission Chair Florian Witt presented the keynote paper, highlighting key transformations in the global financial landscape and their implications for emerging economies like Bangladesh. The session was chaired and moderated by ICC Bangladesh President Mahbubur Rahman.

Mr. Md. Zakir Hossain Chowdhury, Deputy Governor of Bangladesh Bank, attended as the Chief Guest. (The Governor of Bangladesh Bank could not attend as he was in Washington.) In his remarks, Mr. Chowdhury discussed the policy outlook and regulatory reforms being undertaken by Bangladesh Bank to ensure financial sector stability.

Mr. Abdul Hai Sarker, Chairman of the Bangladesh Association of Banks and Chairman of Dhaka Bank PLC, emphasized the importance of financial sector reforms, good governance, and appropriate policy measures to reduce non-performing loans (NPLs).

The panel of speakers included: Mr. Selim R. F. Hussain, Chairman of the Association of Bankers Bangladesh (ABB) and Managing Director & CEO, BRAC Bank; Mr. Mohammad Enamul Huque, Country Chief Risk Officer (CRO), Standard Chartered Bangladesh; Mr. Md. Mahbub Ur Rahman, CEO, HSBC Bangladesh; Dr. Shah Md. Ahsan Habib, Professor, Bangladesh Institute of Bank Management (BIBM); Mr. Bidyut Kumar Saha, Lead Investment Officer, Private Sector Operations Department, Bangladesh Resident Mission, ADB.

The Dialogue was also attended by ICCB Executive Board Members Anwar-ul-Alam Chowdhury (Parvez), Md. Fazlul Hoque, Kamran T. Rahman, Simeen Rahman, and Taskeen Ahmed, among others.



ICC Bangladesh President Mahbubur Rahman (centre) moderated the ***ICC Dialogue on Global Financial Trends & Reforms : Implications for Bangladesh*** *held in Dhaka on 30 April which was attended by Bangladesh Bank Deputy Governor Md. Zakir Hossain Chowdhury (5th from left) as Chief Guest and ICC Global Banking Commission Chairman Florian Witt (5th from right) was the Keynote Speaker. Also seen in the picture as panel Speakers are (L-R) : ICCB Secretary General Ataur Rahman; ADB Lead Investment Officer Bidyut Kumar Saha; Standard Chartered MD Enamul Huque; BAB Chairman Abdul Hai Sarker; ICCB Vice President A. K. Azad; ABB Chairman & MD of BRAC Bank Selim R F Hussain; HSBC CEO Md. Mahbub Ur Rahman and Professor of BIBM Dr. Shah Md Ahsan Habib.*

The event, sponsored by BRAC Bank, Dhaka Bank, and Mutual Trust Bank, brought together around 100 participants, including ICC Bangladesh Executive Board Members, Banking Commission Members, Chairmen, Managing Directors, and Senior Officials from Banks.

ICC Bangladesh Press Statement on Business response to US reciprocal Tariff plan

ICC Bangladesh arranged a press briefing titled "Business Response to the Announcement of the U.S. Reciprocal Tariff Plan" in Dhaka on 7 April.

ICC Bangladesh President Mahbubur Rahman presented the official statement issued by Mr. John W.H. Denton AO, Secretary General of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), the world business organization headquartered in Paris. Speaking on behalf of more than 45 million companies in over 170 countries, the statement described the new U.S. measures as a shock to the global trading system—one that need not result in a systemic crisis.

"What we've seen today represents a watershed moment in American trade policy that poses severe downside risks to the global economy. To put this in historical context, effective U.S. tariff rates now stand at a level not seen since the 1930s—and cover a significantly higher proportion of American GDP than the infamous Smoot-Hawley Act.

This is, without doubt, a shock to the global trading system—but it need not result in a systemic crisis. The U.S. is an economic superpower but accounts for only 13 percent of global imports. How other nations respond to the new duties will ultimately determine the scale and depth of any economic fallout from 'Liberation Day'. We continue to encourage governments to emphasize negotiation and de-escalation—tariff retaliation is a lose-lose game.

We are particularly concerned by the potential impact of severe tariffs on a range of emerging economies—an approach that risks further damaging the development prospects of countries already facing worsening terms of trade.

Businesses across our network will seek urgent clarification from the relevant U.S. authorities on how these new country-level tariffs will be applied—including how they interact

with sector-specific duties and rules of origin requirements. Given the near-immediate enforcement of these measures, there is a clear risk of costly supply chain disruptions and customs backlogs without timely, explicit guidance.

From a broader perspective, it's clear that today's measures pose a fundamental challenge to rules-based trade governance. In addition to bilateral responses to the U.S. administration, governments must act to safeguard the multilateral system and lay the foundation for its revitalization.

Predictability and certainty are fundamental to cross-border commerce. While we understand the U.S. administration's desire to ensure a level playing field, we remain deeply skeptical that a tariff escalation of this scale will deliver that goal—multilateral solutions will ultimately be required to resolve inefficiencies and inequities in the global trading system."

After presenting the ICC statement, ICC Bangladesh President Mahbubur Rahman expressed deep concern over the recent announcement by U.S. President Donald Trump regarding new trade tariffs. The announcement includes a universal 10% tariff on all U.S. imports, alongside additional country-specific tariffs under a "reciprocal" trade framework. As a result, Bangladeshi exports to the U.S. will now be subjected to a 37% tariff—an alarming increase from the previous average of 15%.

Mr. Rahman welcomed the swift response from the Government of Bangladesh and appreciated Chief Adviser Dr. Muhammad Yunus for promptly convening an emergency meeting to assess the impact of the new U.S. tariffs and formulate a response strategy. He also commended the government's decision to send letters to the U.S. President from the Chief Adviser and to the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) from the Commerce Adviser. However, he recommended that these communications be followed by direct talks between the Chief Adviser and the U.S. President.

Furthermore, Mr. Rahman stressed the importance of initiating diplomatic negotiations with U.S. authorities to advocate for more favorable trade terms. This includes seeking exemptions or reductions in the newly imposed tariffs by highlighting the mutual benefits of a balanced and sustainable trade relationship.

To address the evolving trade situation, Mr. Rahman proposed forming a task force under the Ministry of Commerce. This task force should include key stakeholders—such as leading exporters and importers, representatives from the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB), and Customs officials. He recommended that the task force meet regularly to monitor bilateral trade trends, resolve barriers to smooth trade, and develop remedial measures to reduce the trade gap between Bangladesh and the United States.

He also underscored the urgent need for Bangladesh to enhance its global competitiveness by improving infrastructure, logistics, and port operations. In addition, he called for strategic investment in the ready-made garment (RMG) sector—focusing on technological upgrades, workforce skill development, and compliance with international standards. These measures are vital for maintaining Bangladesh's position as a leading global apparel exporter amid mounting external challenges.

The press briefing was also attended by ICC Bangladesh Vice President Naser Ezaz Bijoy; DCCI President Taskeen Ahmed; MCCI President Kamran T. Rahman; BAB Chairman Abdul Hai Sarker; Plummy Fashions Managing Director Md. Fazlul Hoque; Transcom Group CEO Simeen Rahman; and ICCB Secretary General Ataur Rahman.



ICC Bangladesh President Mahbubur Rahman (4th from right) addressing at a Press Briefing on Business response to US reciprocal Tariff Plan held in Dhaka on 7 April. Also seen in the picture are : (R-L) , DCCI President Taskeen Ahmed; Transcom Group CEO Simeen Rahman; BAB Chairman Abdul Hai Sarker; MCCI President Kamran T. Rahman; Plummy Fashions Managing Director Md. Fazlul Hoque; ICC Bangladesh Vice President Naser Ezaz Bijoy and ICCB Secretary General Ataur Rahman.

ICC World Council held in Paris Attended by ICC Bangladesh Secretary General

The 215th session of the ICC World Council was held in Paris on 19 June, attended by Chairs and Secretary Generals of National Committees (NCs), including ICC Bangladesh Secretary General Ataur Rahman. The World Council meeting was preceded by NC Knowledge Sharing Sessions and a Strategic Session held on 17 and 18 June, respectively.



The 215th session of the ICC World Council was held in Paris on 19 June

The Council approved the project plan for Project Phoenix—ICC's flagship initiative aimed at revitalizing the multilateral trading system. Another major focus was ICC's preparations for this year's UN climate conference. ICC's advocacy at the COP-30 meeting in Brazil will center on three key areas: accelerating the deployment of climate finance from private sources; incentivizing business investment in climate adaptation; Supporting the development of strong voluntary carbon markets.

The World Council also approved the establishment of three new National Committees. Conversely, it decided to withdraw recognition of the ICC National Committee in Chile, which was hosted and managed by the Santiago Chamber of Commerce, due to a continuing and unresolvable serious breach of the ICC Global Partnership Agreement. As a result, **ICC Chile is no longer operational** and will be reorganized and relaunched with a new partner.

The Council approved the appointment of five new members to the ICC Executive Board: Mohammad Lootah (UAE), President and CEO, Dubai Chambers; Hui Zhang (China), President, Bank of China; Anousheh Ansari (USA/ Iran), CEO, X Prize Foundation; Kobkarn Wattanavrangkul (Thailand), Chair, Kasikorn Bank & Ken Kobayashi (Japan), Chair, Mitsubishi Corporation (pending confirmation).

In addition, five current members were reappointed for a second term: Holger Bingmann (Germany); Rebecca Enonchong (Cameroon); Marjorie Yang (Hong Kong); Justin d'Agostino (Hong Kong); Lama Al Sulaiman (Saudi Arabia).

As part of its global expansion strategy, the Council approved the establishment of three new National Committees. ICC Mongolia was approved for immediate launch, while ICC Venezuela and ICC Democratic Republic of Congo were conditionally approved, pending the completion of additional requirements.

Finally, the Council approved all agenda items, including ICC's audited financial statements for 2024.

British High Commissioner held meeting withICC Bangladesh President & Members: discussed promotion of bilateral trade and cooperation

The British High Commissioner to Bangladesh, Ms. Sarah Cooke held a Meeting with ICC Bangladesh President and Executive Board Members on 23 June.

ICC Bangladesh President Mahbubur Rahman highlighted the long-standing and dynamic relationship between Bangladesh and the United Kingdom, rooted in deep historical ties, vibrant people-to-people connections, and robust trade.

He noted that since Bangladesh's independence in 1971, the UK has been a key development partner, contributing significantly to the country's socio-economic progress through aid, technical support, and strategic partnerships. The partnership now spans trade, investment, education, governance, climate action, and defence cooperation.

Mr. Rahman underscored the UK's position as one of Bangladesh's largest export destinations, particularly for ready-made garments, and acknowledged the

active presence of British companies in Bangladesh's financial services, energy, and education sectors. He expressed hope for enhanced economic collaboration, exploring avenues for a Free Trade Agreement, and deepening cooperation on global challenges such as climate change and sustainable development.

2029, with 92% of exports remaining tariff-free beyond that.

Ms. Cooke highlighted ongoing collaboration with Bangladesh's Ministry of Commerce, BIDA, and initiatives under the Export Promotion Initiative (EPI). She encouraged diversification

assistance for capacity building, skill development, scholarships for higher education, and related initiatives.

ICCB Vice Presidents A. K. Azad & Naser Ezaz Bijoy and Executive Board Members Abdul Hai Sarker; Aftab Ul Islam; Anwar-Ul



British High Commissioner H.E. Ms. Sarah Cooke (9th from left) attended a meeting with ICC Bangladesh President Mahbubur Rahman (9th from right) and Executive Board Members at ICCB Secretariat.

In response, British High Commissioner Ms. Sarah Cooke expressed appreciation for the strong and historic ties between the two nations. She reaffirmed the UK's commitment to strengthening the partnership, particularly in expanding two-way trade and investment. The High Commissioner noted Bangladesh's graduation from Least Developed Country (LDC) status towards a middle-income country and emphasized the importance of enhancing economic performance to sustain growth.

She mentioned that there is no immediate need for a Free Trade Agreement, as Bangladesh benefits from duty-free/quota-free access under the UK's Developing Countries Trading Scheme until

of Bangladesh's export basket and highlighted the potential opportunities offered by British International Investment (BII). She suggested that Bangladesh could explore greater export prospects in light engineering, leather, seafood, and agro-based products.

Looking ahead, the High Commissioner identified education, climate finance, renewable energy, and technology as promising areas for future collaboration, reinforcing shared priorities for sustainable and inclusive economic development. She also mentioned providing support to women entrepreneurs to help them gain market access in the UK for their products.

It was also suggested to the High Commissioner to provide greater

Alam Chowdhury (Parvez); Md. Fazlul Hoque; Mir Nasir Hossain; Sayeed Ahmed; Showkat Aziz Russell; Simeen Rahman; Banking Commission Chair Muhammad A. (Rumee) Ali; Managing Director of DBL Group M. A. Jabbar and ICCB Secretary General Ataur Rahman also attended the meeting. They welcomed the High Commissioner's initiative and echoed the call for deepening business-to-business and institution-to-institution linkages between the two nations.

The Meeting was also attended by Saiyab Amal Ahmed, Deputy Director of Trade & Investment, British High Commission Dhaka, ICCB General Manager Ajay Bihari Saha & Deputy General Manager Syeda Shahnewaz Lotika.

Argentinean Ambassador called on ICC Bangladesh President discussed promotion of bilateral trade

In a bid to deepen economic and diplomatic relations between Bangladesh and Argentina, H.E. Mr. Marcelo Carlos Cesa, Ambassador of Argentina to Bangladesh on Wednesday (28 May) visited the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) – Bangladesh, The world business organization and called for enhanced bilateral cooperation through targeted business and government delegations.

Speaking at a meeting held at the ICCB Secretariat Ambassador Cesa emphasized the need for structured engagement between both countries to identify new avenues of collaboration in trade, investment, and sectoral development.

"After reopening our Embassy in Dhaka in 2023, we have already observed immense potential in Bangladesh. A high-level delegation exchange could further explore specific areas of cooperation, particularly in export-import and foreign direct investment," he said.

The meeting was chaired by ICCB President Mahbubur Rahman, who highlighted Argentina's growing relevance in Bangladesh's trade diversification strategy. He also recalled the 2019 visit of H.E. Mr. Luis Miguel Etchevehere, the then Government Secretary for Agroindustry of Argentina, which laid the foundation for future cooperation in agriculture and agro-processing.

ICCB Vice President A. K. Azad, Executive Board Members Abdul Hai Sarker, Kutubuddin Ahmed, Managing Director of DBL Group M. A. Jabbar & ICCB Secretary General Ataur Rahman also spoke at the meeting. They welcomed the Ambassador's initiative and echoed the call for deepening business-to-business and institution-to-institution linkages between the two nations.

According to the latest figures, bilateral trade between Bangladesh and Argentina stood at US$765 million in 2022. Key Argentine exports include soybeans, corn, wheat, and cotton, while Bangladesh primarily exports garments and pharmaceuticals.

The Ambassador's visit comes at a time when both nations are exploring avenues for joint ventures, particularly in energy, agribusiness, medical technology, and cotton trade. Cultural ties-such as Bangladesh's passionate support for the Argentine football team-are also seen as a unique bridge to foster closer people-to-people connections.

With both sides expressing commitment to advancing the partnership, the meeting concluded with a shared vision of fostering a robust and diversified bilateral relationship in the years to come.

The Meeting was also attended by Maximiliano Romanello, Minister Counsellor, Embassy of Argentina, ICCB General Manager Ajay Bihari Saha& Deputy General Manager Syeda Shahnewaz Lotika.



Ambassador of Argentina H.E. Mr. Marcelo C. Cesa (5th from left) held a meeting with ICC Bangladesh President Mr. Mahbubur Rahman (5th from right) and Executive Board Members at ICCB Secretariat on Wednesday, May 28.

ICC-ADB-ITC Workshop on SME Toolkit for the right standards in Business held in Dhaka

International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) – Bangladesh, The world business organization, organized a Workshop on Find and pursue the right standards for your business: A Hands-on workshop with the SME Toolkitin collaboration with the Asian Development Bank's (ADB) Trade & Supply Chain Finance Program (TSCFP) and International Trade Centre (ITC) in Dhaka on Saturday 10 May. The workshop was supported by Asian Development Bank's (ADB) Trade & Supply Chain Finance Program (TSCFP).



Group picture of participants with ICCB Vice President A. K. Azad (5th from right-sitting), Secretary General Ataur Rahman (5th from left); ITC Associate Programme Officer DANG Tuan Ducand and Software Engineer Niklas Anders ANDERSSON at the ICC-ADB-ITC Workshop on Find and pursue the SME Toolkit for the right standards in Business.

ICC Bangladesh Vice President A. K Azad inaugurated the Workshop as Chief Guest and Secretary General Ataur Rahman moderated the session. International Trade Centre (ITC) *Associate Programme Officer DANG Tuan Ducand and Software Engineer Niklas Anders ANDERSSON* have made their presentation in different topics during the Workshop.

ICCB Vice President A. K. Azad in his augural address said that SMEs are the backbone of any economy for its growth, development and employment generation. With the graduation to middle income country in 2026, Bangladesh will be facing tight competition from its competitors. Strengthening the SMEs will make immense contribution in the entire supply chain process. We have also to be compliance and ensure sustainability for export growth. As such today's workshop has been organized to engage textile, apparel, and footwear manufacturers in the pilot testing of the ITC/ ADB Sustainability Standards Navigation Toolkit. The Toolkit has developed to help SMEs enhance their awareness of sustainability standards, assess their readiness for certification, and receive actionable recommendations for sustainable practices and compliance for export. Mr. Azad thanked ADB TSCFP and ITC for taking the imitative in developing the toolkit and ensure that ICC Bangladesh will continue to organize workshops for strengthening the capacity of the SMEs to increase their exports.

About 40 participants from SMEs including apparels, textiles & leather industries and other corporate houses attended the workshop.

ICC Workshop on Export Operations, Back-to-Back LC Mechanism and Challenges of Export Finance held in Chattogram

The day-long workshop was organized by ICC Bangladesh on 24 May in Chattogram. Mr. Md. AhsanUllah, Advisor to the Bangladesh Bank Governor inaugurated the workshop and delivered a lecture on SWOT Analysis. ICC Bangladesh Secretary General Ataur Rahman moderated the inaugural and closing session. Mr. Mahmudur Rahman, Deputy Managing Director of Islami Bank Bangladesh PLC was the Resource Person.

Mr. Mahmudur Rahman in his day-long presentation discussed about various issues related back-to-back

LC mechanism, including export finance; lead time calculation in addition requirement for export as per Import Policy Order (IPO), handling discrepant export bill. A total of 90 (79 Participants from 28



*ICC Bangladesh organized a day-long Workshop on **Export Operations, Back-to-Back LC Mechanism and Challenges of Export Finance** on Saturday, 24 May in Chattogram. Md. Ahsan Ullah (Centre), Adviser to the Bangladesh Bank Governor inaugurated the Workshop as Chief Guest. Also seen in the picture are : ICCB Secretary General Ataur Rahman and Islami Bank DMD & Workshop Resource Person Mahmudur Rahman alongwith the participants. A total of 90 participants from 28 Banks including Bangladesh Bank (Central Bank), KAFCO and some clients of Eastern Bank attended the Workshop.*

RMG export and its significance, working capital requirement analysis, LC contract workability analysis with case studies, local value addressing Stock lot / distress cargo and forced loan in export, fraud cases against Export from Bangladesh, export bill negotiation process and Banks, 8 clients sponsored by Eastern Bank PLC and 3 participants from KAFCO) attended the Workshop.

ICC Bangladesh Executive Board Meeting reviewed activities

The 98th ICC Bangladesh Executive Board Meeting was held on 3 June at ICC Bangladesh Secretariat. The Executive Board reviewed the activities of the National Secretariat, Audited Accounts for the year 2024 for placing at the Annual Council 2024 for adoption and discussed about participation at 14th World Chambers Congress (WCC) to by Vice Presidents A.K. Azad and Naser Ezaz Bijoy; Board Members: Abdul Hai Sarker, Kutubuddin Ahmed, Mir Nasir Hossain, Showkat Aziz Russell, Sayeed Ahmed, Tapan



98th ICC Bangladesh Executive Board Meeting in progress

decided to hold the 30th Annual Council 2024 on in mid-July; considered the draft Report of the Executive Board for placing at the Annual Council 2024, approved the be held on 2-4 September 2025 in Melbourne, Australia.

The Meeting chaired by President Mahbubur Rahman was attended Chowdhury and Taskeen Ahmed; ICC Bangladesh Secretary General Ataur Rahman and ICC Bangladesh Banking Commmision Chairman Muhammad A(Rumee) Ali.

ICC Academy & LIBF Online Professional Qualification Courses

ICC Academy offering the following categories professional certification programmes:

Trade finance
- Global Trade Certificate (GTC)
- Certified Trade Finance Professional (CTFP)
- Certificate in Digital Trade Strategy

International business
- Export/Import Certificate (EIC)
- Incoterms® 2020 Certificate (INCO)
- Free Trade Agreement Certificate (FTAC)
- E-Invoicing Solutions Certificate (ESC)
- Microfinance Associate Certificate (MAC)

Regulation and compliance
- Certificate on the Common Reporting Standard (CCRS)
- IMB NVOCC Bill of Lading Certificate (NBL)
- Ethical Marketing and Advertising (EMA)

LIBF offering the following professional qualification certificate courses:

- Certificate for Documentary Credit Specialists (CDCS)
- Certificate for Specialists in Demand Guarantees (CSDG)
- Certificate in International Trade and Finance (CITF)
- Certificate in Trade Finance Compliance (CTFC)
- Certificate in Supply Chain Finance (CSCF)
- Certificate in Principles of Payments (CertPAY)
- Certificate in International Trade Risk (CITR)
- Diploma for Qualified Trade Finance Specialists (QTFS)
- Certified Practitioner in Specialist Property Finance (CPSP)
- Diploma for Financial Advisers (DipFA)
- Financial Services, Regulation and Ethics (FSRE)

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Email: info@iccbangladesh.org.bd

ICC HQs News

ICC elects four new members to the Executive Board

ICC has announced the election of four new members to its 27-member Executive Board: Mohammad Lootah (United Arab Emirates), President and CEO of Dubai Chambers , Hui Zhang (China), President Bank of China, Anousheh Ansari (USA/Iran), CEO of the X Prize Foundation, Kobkarn Wattanavrangkul (Thailand), Chair of Kasikorn Bank.

The new members were formally elected during the annual meeting of the ICC World Council on 19 June 2025 and will each serve a three-year term effective 19 June 2025. The diverse experience of new members will enrich ICC's roadmap to enable peace and prosperity through trade and reflects ICC's continued commitment to geographic representation and diversity of expertise as the world's largest and most inclusive business organisation.

The ICC Executive Board is responsible for developing and implementing ICC's strategy, policy and programme of action as well as for overseeing the financial affairs of ICC.



ICC Chair Philippe Varin said:

"I'm very pleased to welcome this exceptional group of global leaders who bring deep expertise and fresh perspectives to ICC. Their leadership will be vital as we continue charting a path forward in delivering real-world solutions for business in a changing global environment. My thanks also to our outgoing Board members for their contributions."

The new Board members are:

Mohammad Lootah, Anousheh Ansari, Kobkarn Wattanavrangkul & Term renewals. Outgoing Board members are Candace Johnson (United States/Luxemburg), Vice-Chair, NorthStar Earth and Space, Fredrik Cappelen (Sweden), Chairman and Board Member in the Swedish and Nordic industry, Valentina Mintah (Ghana), Founder West Blue Consulting, Zhang Xiaolun (China) Chair, China National Machinery Industry Corporation (SINOMACH).

Leading chambers worldwide : The ICC World Council also ratified the re-election of Rifat Hisarcıklıoğlu as Chair of the ICC World Chambers Federation (WCF) for a second three-year term commencing 20 June 2025. Mr Hisarcıklıoğlu is Chair of ICC Türkiye and President of the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Türkiye (TOBB).

World Chambers Federation announces new leadership for 2025–2028

The ICC World Chambers Federation (WCF) has announced results of its General Council election and the appointment of new Vice-Chairs for the 2025–2028 mandate.

Representing chambers of commerce from around the world, the World Chambers Federation (WCF) is the backbone of the global chamber network. The WCF 2023-2025 mandate saw the most diverse membership in WCF history. The new mandate, which will run from 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2028, will continue to build on global inclusion and representation efforts among WCF leadership to bolster WCF work and impact.

In accordance with WCF bylaws, and in consultation with the ICC Secretary General and the WCF Executive Committee, Rifat Hisarcıklıoğlu, whose second term as WCF Chair was recently ratified, appointed 20 additional members to join the 20 elected members of the WCF Council. 6 new vice-chairs have also been appointed

and approved by the ICC Executive Board. The appointments reflect a more balanced and inclusive composition, with special attention to underrepresented regions and gender diversity. The position of WCF Vice-Chair for Africa, an essential region in our global strategy moving forward, will be confirmed and communicated in due course.

With an unprecedented participation of over 500 chambers from across the globe and a record number of candidates (59), this has been one of the most competitive elections in WCF's history. The strong engagement has resulted in influential elected and appointed Council members who will help steer the WCF network in the years ahead.

"This year's election reflects the strength and diversity of our global chamber community. I'm proud to welcome such a high-caliber group to our Council and Executive Committee, and I look forward to working together to make WCF more inclusive, representative, and impactful than ever before."

— Rifat Hisarcıklıoğlu, Chair, ICC World Chambers Federation

The new WCF Council includes representatives from all regions of the world: 7 from the Americas, 10 from Africa and the Middle East, 9 from Asia-Pacific, and 14 from Europe.

Key takeaways from the first ICC WCF Africa Summit 2025

The first ICC World Chambers Federation (WCF) Africa Summit was held in Nairobi from 9 to 10 April. Co-hosted by the Kenya National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KNCCI), it brought together over 500 participants from more than 60 countries, a testament to the growing recognition of Africa's business potential.

With support from 20 national committees and more than 130 chamber members from our global network, the ICC World Chambers Federation (WCF) Africa Summit underscored the expanding influence of ICC. The event provided a valuable space for African businesses to engage in international trade and foster connections that will drive future growth.

In an inspiring opening keynote, the President of the Republic of Kenya, H.E. DR. William Ruto, said: "Africa is becoming more connected, integrated and entrepreneurial. Our success will depend on how ready we are to embrace change. Hosting this first ever WCF Africa Summit, it is such an honour. Chambers of commerce are indispensable because they bring smart solutions to business and help them navigate the world complexity."

ICC Chair Philipe Varin added : "The International Chamber of Commerce is firmly committed to working with individual African countries and pan-African organisations to ensure that the full potential of the continent can be fully realised – in line with the objectives set forth in the Agenda 2063, the continent's blueprint for sustainable development."



This landmark event was co-organised with the Kenya National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KNCCI), under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) framework to foster economic growth, innovation, and collaboration. The two-day event focused on Africa's growing investment potential and innovative ecosystems while showcasing the region's leadership in sustainable development.

In addition to high-level business sessions and thought-provoking panel discussions, two key workshops were held focusing on the digitalisation of trade and the impact of global policy changes on Africa.

A masterclass led by Managing Director of ICC Digital Standards Initiative Pamela Mar, addressed major challenges in digital trade, including standards interoperability, digital trust, and legal frameworks. It highlighted the importance of policy and legal reforms in supporting Africa's digital trade transformation.

Another masterclass on the recent U.S. tariff changes, was led by ICC Head of Trade, Valerie Picard, and explored recent tariffs' impact on African exporters and trade policy. The session emphasised the role of chambers in helping members adapt and shape a responsive trade agenda for Africa.

The sessions aimed to provide African businesses and chambers with the tools to navigate challenges and seize new opportunities.

The Africa Summit was full of valuable insights into digitalisation of trade and shifting global policies. As the first major WCF event in 20 years held in Africa, the summit marked a crucial step in strengthening the continent's trade position.

Business responds to US reciprocal tariff plan

Following the announcement of the US reciprocal tariff plan, the International Chamber of Commerce has issued a statement describing the new measures as a shock to the global trading system that need not result in a systemic crisis. The US is an economic superpower but only accounts for 13% of global imports. How other nations respond to the new duties will ultimately determine the scale and depth of any economic fallout from "Liberation Day". We continue to



Speaking on behalf of more than 45 million companies in over 170 countries, ICC Secretary General John W.H. Denton AO said: "What we've seen today represents a watershed moment in American trade policy that poses severe downside risks to the global economy. To put this in historical context, effective US tariff rates now stand at a level not seen since the 1930s — and cover a significantly higher proportion of American GDP than the infamous Smoot-Hawley Act.

"This is, without doubt, a shock to the global trading system but it need not result in a systemic crisis. The US is an economic superpower but only accounts for 13% of global imports. How other nations respond to the new duties will ultimately determine the scale and depth of any economic fallout from "Liberation Day". We continue to encourage governments to place an emphasis on negotiation and de-escalation to the greatest extent possible — tariff retaliation is a lose-lose game.

"We are immediately concerned by the potential impact of the severe tariffs imposed on a range of emerging economies — an approach which risks further damaging the development prospects of countries already facing worsening terms of trade.

"Businesses across our network will be seeking urgent clarification from the relevant US authorities on how new country-level tariffs will be applied in practice — including on how they interact with sector-specific duties and rules of origin requirements. Given the almost immediate entry into force of the new measures, there is a clear risk of costly supply chain disruptions and customs backlogs absent of express guidance being provided in a timely manner.

"From a broader perspective, it's clear that the measures announced on 2 April present a fundamental challenge to the rules-based governance of trade. In addition to responding bilaterally to the US administration, we also need to see governments taking action to safeguard the multilateral system — and set the foundations for its eventual revitalisation.

"Predictability and certainty are fundamental to cross-border commerce. We fully appreciate the US administration's desire to secure a level playing field for international trade but remain deeply sceptical that a tariff escalation of this scale can deliver on that goal — multilateral solutions will ultimately be needed to resolve longstanding inefficiencies and inequities in the global trading system."

ICC responds to US-EU tariff proposal

In response to a US proposal to increase tariffs on European Union goods, ICC is calling for redoubled ongoing efforts to renew the US-EU trade relationship.

"The proposed tariff hike on EU imports introduces major uncertainty into one of the most stable and integrated trade relationships in the world. The immediate effect — for businesses on both sides of the Atlantic — will be to further chill investment decisions, disrupt essential supply chains and undermine market confidence.

"The transatlantic relationship is not only of immense economic importance — it is, in many ways, the cornerstone of the rules-based global trading system. For decades, EU-US trade has set an important standard for openness, reliability and shared prosperity. A sharp escalation in tariffs between two central pillars of the global economy risks sending shockwaves through the global business community

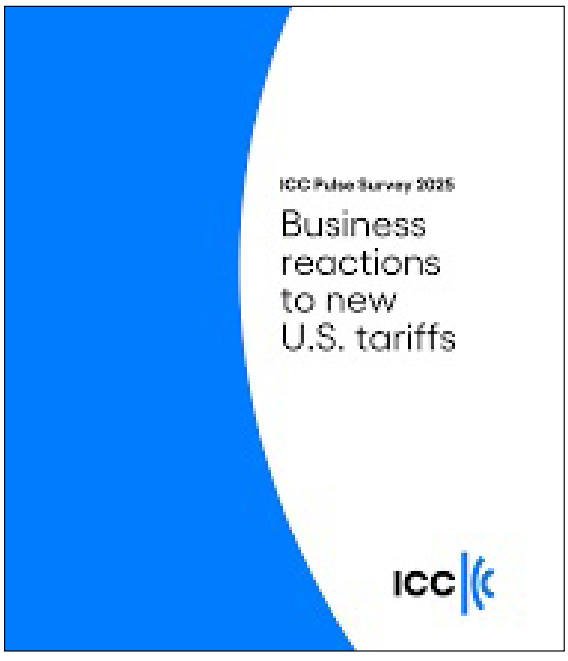


at a time when stability is at an absolute premium.

"We call on the US and EU to redouble ongoing efforts to renew their trade relationship. A swift and coordinated de-escalation is essential to preserve the trust and stability that underpin international commerce, business investment and job creation."

ICC Pulse Survey 2025: Business reactions to new U.S. tariffs

The International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) conducted a pulse survey of its global business network from 3 -11 April 2025. The Survey assesses the impact of newly announced U.S. tariff measures.



Conducted after the announcement of new U.S. tariff measures on 2 April 2025, the ICC Pulse Survey gathered insights from 448 companies across 68 countries, spanning a wide range of company sizes and sectors. The findings reveal deep concern among businesses worldwide regarding rising costs, supply chain uncertainty, and the threat of trade retaliation.

The survey findings cover: Global business sentiment in the wake of the 2 April tariff announcement; Regional, sectoral, company-size breakdowns of the expected impacts and top concerns; Business outlook for the next 6-12 months.

Key findings:

60% of respondents view the new tariffs negatively; Top concerns include increased costs (64%), planning uncertainty (47%), and supply chain disruptions (45%); Ripple effects are being felt in service sectors like accommodation and food services; Large companies are twice as likely as SMEs to cite trade retaliation as a top concern (50% vs. 25–35%); Over 70% of businesses reported either heightened caution or a more pessimistic outlook for the coming 6–12 months — signaling broader apprehension about economic stability.

Joint Statement by ICC and WTO heads on Financing for Development

Ngozi-Okonjo Iweala, Director-General of the World Trade Organization and John W.H. Denton AO, Secretary General of the International Chamber of Commerce issued the following statement at the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development in Seville:

We reaffirm our shared commitment to harnessing the power of trade as a driver of global development.

A well-functioning multilateral trading system remains essential to enabling private sector-led growth — particularly in emerging and developing economies, where local businesses depend on predictable rules, open markets, and efficient trade processes to compete and thrive.

Yet too many businesses around the world continue to face barriers that hinder their full participation in global trade. From constrained access to trade finance and working capital services, to excessive border delays and customs inefficiencies, these obstacles often hit the smallest and most dynamic enterprises the hardest — undermining both job creation and development impact.



We call on governments and development partners gathered in Seville to:

- Reaffirm the centrality of the multilateral trading system as a foundation for global development;

- Strengthen efforts to identify and address regulatory frictions that inhibit cross-border trade and associated financing — including, as a priority, the erosion of correspondent banking networks and the unintended impacts of financial crime compliance regimes that have led to de-risking, particularly in regions most in need of trade finance.
- Support coordinated efforts to strengthen trade-related infrastructure, digitalization of trade processes, and targeted capacity building for SMEs to enhance economic and supply chain resilience.

As the global community focuses on strengthening economic resilience and fostering growth, enabling trade must be a central pillar of any serious strategy for mobilizing private capital at scale. This must be underpinned by a shared effort to modernize core multilateral trade rules in line with the realities of 21st century commerce.

We stand ready to work with all stakeholders to ensure that trade can deliver on its full potential for people, planet, and prosperity.

Major banks set industry milestone with endorsement of ICC's Principles for Sustainable Trade Finance

A group of leading Trade Finance banks on 13 June announced their endorsement of the International Chamber of Commerce's (ICC) Principles for Sustainable Trade Finance (ICC PSTF). This group, and further supporting banks, collectively represent as much as 25% of the global trade finance market by volume.

The work, led by ICC, with support from Boston Consulting Group (BCG) and newly announced endorsement by Commerzbank, ING, Santander, and Standard Chartered aims to provide clear, transparent, and consistent guidelines to enable banks, corporates and investors to effectively channel capital towards sustainable and inclusive trade finance facilities.

Unlike for many other financial products, trade finance practitioners have historically not had a clear, consistent and consensus definition on what constitutes sustainable trade finance, limiting its application. The principles, launched in October 2024, therefore provide a robust methodology for evaluating sustainable trade finance transactions, including a globally acceptable approach for assessing use-of-proceeds in trade finance transactions, proposed due diligence protocols for sustainability verification and unified reporting standards to ensure consistency across financial institutions.



As a next step, with support of these banks, ICC plans to further build on the principles including defining legal terms and extending its coverage to social sustainability, while also working with the broader trade ecosystem – including banks, corporates and regulators – to expand further endorsement. ICC welcomes any users who also wish to endorse the PSTF to an additional endorsement announcement in circa Q3 2025.

ICC arbitration tops global survey

The Arbitration Rules of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) have been named the world's preferred arbitration rules in a global survey investigating current trends in user preferences and perceptions.

Conducted by Queen Mary University in partnership with White & Case, the 2025 International Arbitration Survey results state:

"The ICC Arbitration Rules are highly regarded, with many interviewees highlighting their established reputation and ease of use for arbitrators and counsel, as well as the support of the Secretariat."

The survey revealed a strong preference among arbitration

communities on every continent for the ICC Arbitration Rules, from a choice of more than 60 sets of rules. The ICC Rules took top position in Africa (53%), the Caribbean and Latin America (74%), Europe (60%), the Middle East (59%) and North America (55%), underlining the global character and adaptability of the regulations.

In 2024, 831 new cases were filed under the ICC Arbitration Rules, with a total of 2,392 parties from 136 jurisdictions.

Claudia Salomon, President of the ICC International Court of Arbitration, said:

"We're delighted that the ICC Court again tops the list of the Queen Mary Study as the most-preferred arbitral institution globally. Our services are built on over 100 years of experience, combined with our continued focus on meeting the evolving needs of the parties. We take this opportunity to thank those who entrust the resolution of their disputes to ICC. Our ranking would not be possible without the exemplary leadership and dedication of the ICC Court members and the Secretariat".

The 2025 International Arbitration Survey investigates current trends in user preferences and perceptions, as well as opportunities to shape the future of international arbitration practice. The 2025 edition is the



result of 2,402 questionnaire responses and 117 interviews with a diverse pool of participants.

ICC joins Business Call to Action to accelerate global cooperation for our oceans

In a joint Business Call to Action more than 80 businesses and supporting organisations from 25 countries, including 55 businesses representing over €600 billion in turnover and 2 million employees,



urged both private and public decisions-makers to strengthen global cooperation and accelerate action to conserve and sustainably use the ocean.

As the largest business association in the world, the International Chamber of Commerce is proud to be a convener of this important call to action, bringing the voice of the global business community to the United Nations Ocean Conference.

The call is convened by an unprecedented coalition of business networks, supported by signatories, including 80 businesses. In anticipation of the upcoming 2025 United Nations Ocean Conference in Nice, France, the call builds on the experience of leading businesses and organisations already advancing a sustainable blue economy. It emphasises the intrinsic connection between land and sea, highlighting the contribution and interdependencies between coastal and marine environment and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

This call is directed at all economic actors, whether directly or indirectly connected to the ocean, and includes:

A call to action for businesses to expedite maintaining ocean health through business actions, such as contributions to ocean science, monitoring and reducing environmental impacts, incorporating ocean considerations into their climate and nature roadmaps and investing in blue solutions.

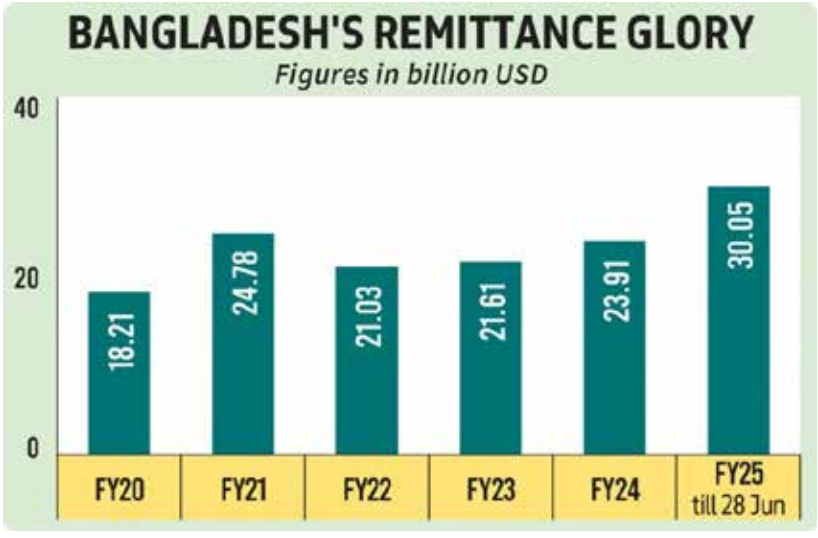
A call to action for policy makers to pursue ambitious science-driven policies and measures that stimulate sustainable business action and to jointly address land and ocean for enhanced global resilience

With this Business Call to Action, companies and business networks urge policymakers to: Agree to adopt and implement international agreements: champion strong, sustainable outcomes for existing and upcoming ocean-related agreements; Invest in ocean science and support strong science-policy interfaces; Acknowledge and embed into policies the links between ocean, nature and climate; Help all actors to collectively adapt to sea-level rise; Develop robust and innovative finance mechanisms; Raise awareness to encourage all actors to care for the ocean, even those based on land.

Bangladesh Economy

Record $30.04b in Remittances sent by expatriate Bangladeshis in FY25

Expatriate Bangladeshis have sent a record $30.04 billion in remittances during the current fiscal year 2024–25, marking the highest amount ever received in a single fiscal year in Bangladesh's history. According to the Bangladesh Bank, this figure represents a 25.5% increase compared to the $23.74 billion received in the previous fiscal year (FY24).



Bangladesh Bank spokesperson Arif Hossain Khan confirmed the data, noting that this surpasses the previous record of $24.77 billion received in FY 2020–21, when remittance inflows surged during the Covid-19 pandemic due to restrictions on informal hundi channels and the introduction of incentive bonds.

In June alone, remittance inflows totaled $2.53 billion, up from $2.37 billion in the same month last year. Bankers attributed the sharp rise to competitive exchange rates offered by banks as well as stricter government controls over informal remittance channels. More than $2.5 billion is now coming in every month, reflecting restored confidence and reduced reliance on illegal channels.

Foreign Exchange Reserves cross $25 billion after two and a half years

Bangladesh's foreign exchange reserves have surpassed $25 billion for the first time in two and a half years, driven by increased remittance inflows and disbursements from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank (WB), and other development partners.

According to Bangladesh Bank data, reserves stood at $25.51 billion on 29 June, based on the IMF's calculation method, up from $21.38 billion just a week earlier. This marks a week-on-week increase of $4.13 billion. This is the highest level of reserves since the end of December 2022, when they were recorded at $26.02 billion.

Following that period, reserves steadily declined, contributing to a significant depreciation of the taka, rising import costs, and higher inflation. Based on the central bank's own calculations, gross foreign exchange reserves reached $30.51 billion on 29 June, compared to $26.55 billion the previous week.

According to a Senior Bangladesh Bank official reserves were boosted by the release of the third and fourth loan tranches from the IMF, totaling $1.34 billion. Additionally, the reserves were strengthened by $500 million



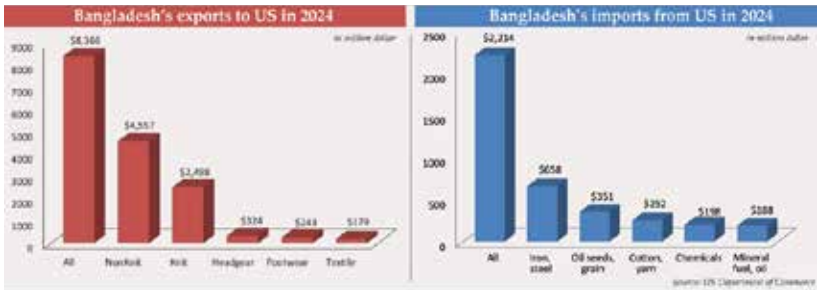
from the World Bank and $900 million from the Asian Development Bank, raising Bangladesh's import payment capacity to more than four and a half months.

Trump's Tariff policy may open export opportunities for Bangladesh : WTO

The World Trade Organization (WTO) has observed that ongoing trade tensions between the United States and China, especially under former President Donald Trump's tariff hikes, could create new export opportunities for Least Developed Countries (LDCs) like Bangladesh. The insight comes from the WTO Secretariat's latest *Global Trade Outlook and Statistics* report, released on 16 April 2025.

According to the report, Bangladesh, along with Cambodia and Lesotho, stands to benefit as the U.S. reduces its reliance on Chinese imports—particularly in sectors like clothing, textiles, and electronic equipment, where Bangladesh has a competitive

edge. "Their exports are highly dependent on products for which China currently has a large import share in total US imports," the report said.



Bangladesh's growing capacity in garments and electronics could help fill the void left by declining Chinese exports, offering a strategic trade opening. The WTO's analysis comes at a time when U.S. imports from China are projected to fall significantly, while Chinese exports are expected to rise in other global regions due to trade redirection.

However, the global trade outlook is clouded by rising tariffs and growing trade policy uncertainty (TPU). WTO economists forecast a 0.2 per cent decline in world merchandise trade volume in 2025, assuming the U.S. suspension of reciprocal tariffs remains in place. But if those tariffs are reimposed and TPU spreads, trade could shrink by as much as 1.5 per cent this year.

The report notes that the forecast for 2025 is nearly three percentage points lower than earlier expectations due to policy shifts. "The new projection marks a significant reversal from the beginning of the year when expectations were for continued trade expansion," it added.

Trade in commercial services, though not directly affected by tariffs, is also under pressure. The WTO expects services trade to grow by 4.0 per cent in 2025 and 4.1 per cent in 2026—both well below earlier projections of 5.1 per cent and 4.8 per cent respectively. Services such as logistics, travel, and investment-related sectors are particularly vulnerable.

This year's report is notable for including service trade projections for the first time. It warns that disruptions in US-China trade may trigger significant diversion, increasing competition in third markets, especially in Asia.

In 2024, world merchandise trade grew by 2.9 per cent and services trade by 6.8 per cent. Despite these gains, the outlook for 2025 remains fragile, with projected global GDP growth of only 2.2 per cent.

In value terms, merchandise exports rose to US$ 24.43 trillion, while commercial services exports hit US$ 8.69 trillion, reflecting strong global demand but falling prices.

USTR flags trade barriers, corruption as key hurdles for US Businesses in Bangladesh

The Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) has identified multiple trade and investment barriers that continue to hinder American business operations in Bangladesh. In its 2025 Foreign Trade Barriers Report, released in March, the USTR cites high tariffs, regulatory delays, entrenched corruption, and restrictive digital policies as major obstacles.

As of 2023, Bangladesh maintained an average Most-Favoured-Nation (MFN) tariff of 14.1%, with agricultural products taxed at 17.7% and non-agricultural goods at 13.5%. Alarmingly, only 17.6% of tariff lines are bound under WTO rules, with an average bound rate of 155.1%, allowing the possibility of abrupt tariff hikes.

The report also criticized Bangladesh's slow implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, ratified in 2016. Outdated customs practices and lack of transparency continue to create non-tariff barriers.

In terms of investment, although 100% foreign ownership is allowed in most sectors, strategic areas like petroleum, gas, and telecom remain restricted. US firms also face delays in no-objection certificates, profit repatriation, and procurement, often citing arbitrary decision-making and favoritism.

The USTR highlighted corruption as "pervasive," with US companies reporting frequent bribe demands for licenses and approvals. The national e-procurement system has yet to ensure fair competition.

On digital trade, the report raised concerns about the Cyber Security Act 2023, which allows online speech prosecution and

government surveillance, creating uncertainty for cross-border digital commerce. Intellectual property rights also remain weak, with enforcement gaps across sectors, especially in pharmaceuticals and apparel.

Lastly, labour rights issues remain unresolved. Bangladesh has been suspended from the US Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) since 2013. Despite a proposed 11-point Labour Action Plan in 2024, progress remains slow. The report comes amid rising tensions, as the US recently imposed 37% tariffs on Bangladeshi goods, exacerbating bilateral trade challenges.

Bangladeshi Banks among Asia's worst hit by US tariffs: Moody's warns

Moody's investors service has warned that Bangladesh's banking sector is among the most vulnerable in Asia to the latest round of US tariff hikes, announced by President Donald Trump on April 2. The ratings agency released



its assessment on April 7, noting that the tariffs will have a credit-negative impact across the Asia-Pacific (APAC) region, but the effects will be particularly harsh for banks in Vietnam, Thailand, and Bangladesh, due to their heavy dependence on exports to the US.

For Bangladesh, the primary concern lies in the ready-made garment (RMG) sector, which accounts for over 85% of the country's total exports and roughly 20% of outstanding bank loans. The new US tariffs on Bangladeshi exports, including garments, are expected to undermine competitiveness, especially when compared to regional rivals like India and Pakistan, which face lower additional duties.

Moody's further highlights that the operating environment for Bangladeshi banks is already under stress due to slowing economic growth, political unrest, supply chain disruptions, and labour tensions in the RMG sector. As a result, asset quality in export-dependent industries is expected to deteriorate, putting added pressure on bank balance sheets.

Although Bangladeshi banks have relatively lower exposure to SMEs—less than 10% of total loans—the impact on loan quality will still be felt, particularly in sectors tied to global supply chains. In contrast, banks in Thailand and Vietnam, which have SME loan exposures of around 20%, are expected to face even more severe challenges.

According to the report, US tariffs are now very high for exports from Bangladesh, Vietnam, and Thailand. While China faces the highest total tariff rate—around 54%—Moody's believes its impact will be more manageable due to China's economic diversification and the relatively small share of exports to the US (less than 3% of GDP in 2024). Furthermore, Chinese authorities are expected to offer policy support to stabilize growth and investor confidence.

In response to the growing pressure across APAC, Moody's anticipates that central banks may ease monetary policy, either by lowering interest rates earlier than expected or slowing the pace of rate hikes, as is already being considered in Japan. While such steps could provide short-term relief, they may also compress bank margins, further eroding profitability.

Finally, Moody's expects greater government support and regulatory intervention in highly affected countries, including loan restructuring schemes and targeted relief for the most exposed sectors, to help contain the fallout from the trade disruption.

Macroeconomic Indicators show early signs of stability: Standard Chartered

Bangladesh's macroeconomic indicators are showing initial signs of stabilisation after months of volatility, according to Standard Chartered Bangladesh. The bank noted that inflation appears to have peaked, foreign exchange reserves are steadying, the taka has strengthened, and export performance is improving.

These observations were shared during Standard Chartered's "Global Research Briefing" held in Dhaka on June 25, where policymakers, private sector leaders, and clients gathered to discuss the country's economic outlook, the bank said in a press release. Its research projects Bangladesh's GDP growth at 5 percent for the fiscal year 2025–26.

While acknowledging persistent global uncertainties, the bank expressed a cautiously optimistic view, citing ongoing policy reforms, improving economic fundamentals, and opportunities for sustainable growth.

"Although short-term indicators suggest a possible turning point, our confidence is based on the strength

of long-term fundamentals," said Naser Ezaz Bijoy, CEO of Standard Chartered Bangladesh. "Stabilisation creates opportunities, but it will require coordinated policy actions, external support, and structural reforms," he added.

Saurav Anand, an economist at Standard Chartered, echoed this sentiment, noting that recent reforms have "significantly improved macroeconomic fundamentals," pointing to cooling inflation, a more stable exchange rate, and rising reserves.

However, the research also highlighted structural challenges, such as slowing private sector credit growth, high levels of non-performing loans, and weak revenue mobilisation. The bank emphasised the need for fiscal consolidation and subsidy reforms to unlock Bangladesh's long-term growth potential.

ADB-World Bank pledge $1.5b for banking reforms, climate adaptation and cleaner energy initiatives

Bangladesh is set to receive over $1.5 billion in fresh funding from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the World Bank to support banking reforms, climate adaptation, and cleaner energy initiatives.

The ADB on 15 June approved a $900 million loan package, with $500 million dedicated to stabilizing Bangladesh's banking sector. The funding will help enhance Bangladesh Bank's liquidity management, strengthen supervision, and address the growing burden of defaulted loans, ADB officials stated. According to Sanjeev Kaushik, a principal financial sector specialist at the bank, key challenges in the sector include poor asset quality, liquidity shortages, and limited financial intermediation, all contributing to weak financial inclusion.

In addition, the ADB cleared a $400 million loan for the second phase of its Climate-Resilient Inclusive Development Programme (CRIDP). This initiative will promote coordinated action on climate adaptation, emissions reduction, and inclusive growth. It will also establish the Bangladesh Climate Development Partnership to help ministries plan, track, and evaluate climate-related projects.

CRIDP will get further co-financing of $113 million from the Agence Française de Développement and $400 million from the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. The programme aims to integrate government efforts with national climate policies, revise Dhaka's Strategic Transport Masterplan, and monitor renewable energy targets to encourage greener energy and transport solutions.

Separately, the World Bank has approved $640 million for two projects targeting enhanced gas supplies and improved air quality.

These combined measures come as Bangladesh faces growing climate threats. Tropical cyclones already cost the country about $1 billion annually, while severe flooding could reduce economic growth by up to 9 percent by 2050. Projections suggest that by 2070, Bangladesh could lose nearly a third of its GDP if high emissions persist, severely undermining land resources and food security.

ADB increased lending by 67%, $2b Set for 2025

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is set to increase its loan commitment to Bangladesh by 67% in 2025, raising the amount from $1.2 billion in 2024 to $2 billion. This expansion is part of a broader effort to support Bangladesh's development needs while addressing the inefficiencies in project execution.

The move comes after a sharp decline in ADB lending in 2024, when commitments fell from $3.4 billion to $1.2 billion. According to ADB's latest portfolio review report, the lender also plans to repurpose funds from long-delayed and underperforming projects to free up resources for new lending aligned with the priorities of the interim government.

The ADB flagged the year 2025 as a "challenging" one for Bangladesh, citing political transitions, bureaucratic reshuffles, and persistent implementation challenges. In this context, it recommended partial cancellation of loans from poorly performing projects to create more headroom for effective investments.

Bangladesh's current loan portfolio with the ADB stands at $11.79b across 52 projects. However, delays in implementation often lead to significant commitment charges—fees paid to the ADB for undisbursed funds. At present, $2.39b remains undisbursed from $7.07 billion in Ordinary Capital Resource (OCR) loans, resulting in $30.89m paid in commitment charges over the past decade, including $3.58m in 2023 alone.

ADB's analysis revealed that delayed project implementation and prolonged disbursement cycles are key contributors to these costs. For example, the Greater Dhaka Sustainable Urban Transport Project, initially approved in 2012 at a cost of $255m, faced multiple delays and cost escalations, leading to an increase in total cost to $494.39m and an extended deadline to December 2022.

The ADB's loan share also increased to $260m from the original $160m. Other delayed projects include the Power System Efficiency Improvement Project, approved in 2011 with a completion date of 2017, but now extended to end of 2025, and the Dhaka Environmentally Sustainable Water Supply Project, which began in 2013 but remains incomplete.

The ADB emphasized that restructuring and repurposing underperforming loans will not only improve project efficiency but also enhance portfolio performance and ensure better use of public funds in Bangladesh.

World Bank approved $250m to strengthen Public Sector

The World Bank has approved $250 million to improve transparency, efficiency, and accountability in Bangladesh's public sector.

The financing will support the Strengthening Institutions for Transparency and Accountability (SITA) Project, which aims to modernize key public sector functions, including data transparency, revenue collection, public investment management, procurement systems, and financial oversight.



According to a statement, the initiative will enhance the capacities of five critical government agencies: the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, National Board of Revenue, Planning Division, Bangladesh Public Procurement Authority, and the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General.

The project seeks to streamline government operations, improve the delivery of public services, and expand citizen access to reliable data, supporting evidence-based policymaking. It will also upgrade tax administration systems to raise compliance and strengthen domestic revenue, bolstering fiscal sustainability.

Additionally, the project will develop the next phase of electronic government procurement (e-GP), extend its reach, and modernize Bangladesh's public audit systems through digitisation. "The investment will use digitization to make business processes more transparent, curb corruption, and help Bangladesh build public institutions that can serve a dynamic economy," said Gayle Martin, the World Bank's Interim Country Director for Bangladesh. "This will enhance public service quality and build greater trust in government institutions."

The World Bank and the Government of Bangladesh are also preparing a related development policy credit, due for Board consideration later this month. That credit will support broader reforms in domestic revenue mobilization, data management, procurement, banking oversight, and social program delivery.

Souleymane Coulibaly, World Bank Lead Country Economist and Task Team Leader, noted, "By targeting five essential institutions, the SITA Project will raise government effectiveness, which is vital for sustainable growth." He added that the project and the upcoming policy credit will work in tandem to improve public financial management and service delivery across the country.

WB approved $270m for flood recovery project

The Government of Bangladesh and the International Development Association (IDA), the concessional lending arm of the World Bank Group, signed a $270 million financing agreement on 25 May to support Bangladesh's sustainable recovery and disaster resilience efforts through the 'Bangladesh

Sustainable Recovery, Emergency Preparedness and Response Project (B-STRONG).'

Md. Shahriar Kader Siddiky, Secretary of the Economic Relations Division (ERD), and Gayle Martin, Acting Country Director of the World Bank, Dhaka Office, signed the agreement on behalf of their respective parties.

The B-STRONG project, scheduled to be implemented from July 2025 to December 2030, aims to restore key infrastructure damaged by the catastrophic August 2024 floods while strengthening long-term resilience across vulnerable sectors.

The project comprises five major components and will be executed through a multi-agency framework. Key implementing bodies include the Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) under the Ministry of Water Resources; Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) and Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC) under the Ministry of Agriculture; Department of Disaster Management (DDM) under the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief; the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED); and the Social Development Foundation (SDF) under the Financial Institutions Division.

According to an official statement, the project will not only rebuild damaged roads and embankments but also provide targeted support to rehabilitate flood-affected farmers and boost agricultural productivity. It is designed to enhance climate resilience, reduce the impact of future floods, and support overall economic revitalization in affected areas.

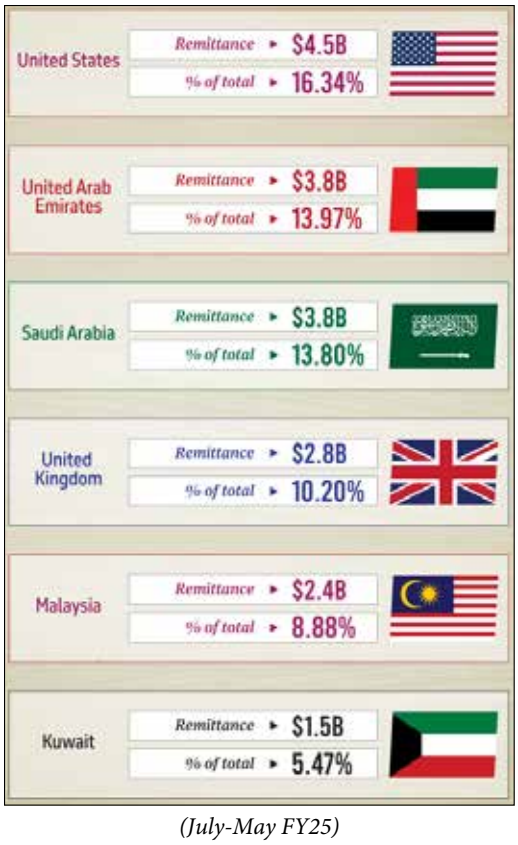
The concessional loan comes with a 30-year maturity period, including a five-year grace period. The loan carries a service charge of 0.75% and an annual interest rate of 1.25% on disbursed balances. Although a commitment fee of up to 0.50% applies, the World Bank has consistently waived this fee in recent years.

As Bangladesh's largest multilateral development partner, the World Bank has provided more than $43.5 billion in assistance since the country's independence. Currently, the World Bank's active portfolio in Bangladesh stands at $13.10 billion, spanning 47 projects focused on economic growth, infrastructure, institutional development, social services, and energy.

Mismatch in migration and remittance: US, UAE lead as Saudi slips behind

World Bank flags alarming mismatch in migration and remittance trends

Despite Saudi Arabia remaining the primary destination for Bangladeshi migrant workers, it is the United States and the United Arab Emirates that are sending back the lion's share of remittances, according to the World Bank's latest *Bangladesh Development Update.*



(July-May FY25)

The report reveals a record 27.6% year-on-year increase in remittance inflows during the first eight months of FY25. However, it also highlights a critical disconnect between where most Bangladeshi migrants go and where most of the money comes from.

As per the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET), over 46.34 lakh Bangladeshi workers currently reside in Saudi Arabia, with the UAE in second place hosting 22.06 lakh. Yet, remittance inflows tell a different story: Saudi Arabia contributed less than 13% of the total, while the UAE accounted for 17%.

Topping the chart is the United States, which hosts just over 3.04 lakh Bangladeshi migrants, according to the US Census Bureau. Despite the relatively small diaspora size, it contributed a staggering 18.2% of total remittances to Bangladesh. Experts attribute this trend to the higher skill level and earning capacity of migrants in the West, compared to low-wage, low-productivity jobs held by most Gulf migrants.

"The gap between where our people migrate and where our remittances come from has become too wide to ignore," said Shariful Hasan, associate director of BRAC's Migration Programme. "The dollar and pound's strong exchange rate against the taka, coupled with the 2.5% government incentive,

are motivating migrants to use official channels."

The World Bank warned that the current reliance on a few low-income destinations, along with stricter visa policies in Gulf nations, poses long-term risks. Nearly 74.5% of new migrant outflows in the first half of FY25 were still to Saudi Arabia, though total outflows declined by 26.9%.

"This is not sustainable," Shariful cautioned. "We're exporting labour where wages are low, but returns are shrinking. We urgently need a migration strategy based on skills and diversified destinations."

Mustafizur Rahman, distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), echoed the concern. "We asked the Bangladesh Bank governor why remittances from Saudi Arabia are declining despite high migration. Hundi may have been a factor earlier, but that's no longer the case. The system may have leaks or policy flaws that need investigation."

Migration economist Prof Mohammad Jalal Uddin also warned that current remittance highs may be driven by temporary factors and shouldn't be seen as a long-term trend.

Bangladesh faces alarming rise in poverty : World Bank

The World Bank's latest *Bangladesh Development Update* paints a grim picture of the country's economic outlook, warning that up to 3 million more Bangladeshis could slip into extreme poverty by 2025. This would raise the extreme poverty rate from 7.7% to 9.3%, pushing the total number of people living below $2.15 a day to 15.8 million. Overall, nearly 39 million people could fall below the national poverty line—undoing decades of hard-earned gains in poverty reduction.

The surge in poverty is being driven by multiple interlinked challenges, with persistently high inflation at the core. Since early 2022, inflation has remained above 9%, while wage growth has lagged behind—reaching just 8.15% in March 2025. This mismatch is eroding purchasing power, especially for lower-income families, many of whom are being forced to cut back on essentials like food, education, and healthcare.

Inflation, described as a "silent tax," is hitting rural communities the hardest, where incomes are largely fixed and even minor price hikes can tip households into poverty. At the same time, the labour market remains weak due to political instability, structural deficiencies, and sluggish economic growth. The government's limited capacity to respond is further strained by a Tk 65,000 crore revenue shortfall and the lowest ADP implementation rate in six years.

Private investment is also faltering due to policy uncertainty and tighter access to credit, leading many businesses to shrink or close altogether. This has disproportionately affected informal sector workers, day labourers, and small traders—deepening inequality and putting pressure on already vulnerable communities.

Beyond income, Bangladesh's poverty is deeply multidimensional, with millions also suffering from inadequate access to education, healthcare, housing, and basic services. The growing risk to the middle class—a pillar of economic resilience and social cohesion—is equally alarming.

To address this crisis, the World Bank urges urgent, coordinated action. Controlling inflation through sound monetary policy and breaking market syndicates is crucial. Raising minimum wages, especially in sectors like garments, can help restore purchasing power. Expanding social safety nets and improving tax collection are also critical to support vulnerable populations and fund public investment.

Long-term solutions include diversifying the economy beyond garments into agro-processing, ICT, and tourism; investing in education and healthcare; and promoting rural employment through infrastructure projects.

The World Bank's warning is a call to action. Without decisive steps, rising poverty could threaten Bangladesh's social stability and economic future. But with bold reforms and inclusive strategies, this crisis can still become a turning point for sustainable development.

UNDP commits $18.5m to support free, fair elections in Bangladesh

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has pledged $18.53 million to help ensure a fair and democratic process in Bangladesh's upcoming 13th national parliamentary elections.

Election Commission Senior Secretary Akhtar Ahmed shared the news on 18 June at the Election Commission headquarters in Dhaka. Earlier in the day, the Australian High Commission and UNDP signed a Memorandum of Understanding as part of the development partners' collaboration under the UNDP-led initiative titled "The BALLOT."

Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin, UNDP Resident

Representative Stefan Liller, and Australian High Commissioner Susan Ryle were present at the signing ceremony.

Susan Ryle emphasized Australia's commitment to supporting Bangladesh's electoral process, noting, "Australia and Bangladesh are close friends and partners, and we welcome the opportunity to work with Bangladesh on promoting free, fair, and democratic elections." She added that Australia has already contributed nearly $2 million directly to "The BALLOT" project and recently hosted five officials from the Reform Commission for training on voter registration and national identity card systems.

Stefan Liller explained that after the new Election Commission was formed last year, it sought UN support to prepare for the election. In response, the UN sent a "Needs Assessment Mission" to Bangladesh in January, consulting with stakeholders to define the scope of technical assistance. These recommendations evolved into "The BALLOT Project," which was approved by the Bangladesh government and involves cooperation with the Economic Relations Division. Australia is the first country to contribute formal funding.

According to Akhtar Ahmed, the project will cover 16 key components, including capacity building, voter awareness, training, and strengthening the institutional framework. Activities under this project will continue through December 31, 2027.

IMF approves $1.3b for fourth and fifth tranches of loan

The International Monetary Fund has approved the disbursement of about $1.3 billion to Bangladesh, covering both the fourth and fifth tranches of its $4.7 billion loan program. The decision, made by the IMF's executive board on June 23, also added $800 million to the original package and granted a six-month extension. This marks the first IMF disbursement under Bangladesh's interim government.

Bangladesh Bank Governor Ahsan H Mansur confirmed the approval. The IMF also agreed to modify some performance criteria and granted a waiver related to exchange restrictions, acknowledging that Bangladesh had taken corrective measures.

Despite a turbulent political and economic environment, the IMF said the country's overall program performance remained satisfactory during its third and fourth reviews. Following the 2024 uprising and change of government, Bangladesh has seen improved political stability, which is helping economic recovery.

However, the IMF warned that the economic outlook remains under pressure due to continued political uncertainty, tighter policy conditions, rising global trade barriers, and stress in the banking sector. Deputy Managing Director Nigel Clarke stressed the need to rebuild external resilience and reduce inflation in the near term.

Clarke also welcomed Bangladesh's move to adopt a new exchange rate system and introduce revenue-boosting measures in its 2025–26 budget. Maintaining a balanced policy — including tight monetary conditions, a flexible exchange rate, and revenue-driven fiscal consolidation — will be essential to restore macroeconomic stability.

Raising tax revenues, cutting subsidies, and rationalising expenditures are critical to creating the fiscal space needed for social and climate programs, he added. Sustained reforms, including tax administration improvements and greater export diversification, will be vital for Bangladesh's ambition to reach upper middle-income status, according to the IMF.

Bangladesh signs $400m budget support loan agreement with AIIB

The government of Bangladesh has signed a $400 million loan agreement with the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) to support the implementation of the *Climate Resilient Inclusive Development Programme–Subprogram 2.*

The agreement was signed on June 23 by Mirana Mahrukh, Additional Secretary of the Economic Relations Division (ERD) under the Ministry of Finance, and Rajat Misra, Acting Chief Investment Officer for Public Sector (Region 1) and Financial Institutions and Funds (Global) Clients, as well as Director General of the Public Sector Clients Department Region 1, on behalf of the AIIB.

The programme, overseen by the Finance Division, focuses on three



key reform areas: (a) establishing an enabling environment for implementing climate priorities across ministries, (b) facilitating climate adaptation measures, and (c) accelerating climate change mitigation efforts.

The loan will be provided on standard AIIB terms and conditions, with a maturity period of 35 years, including a five-year grace period. It carries an interest rate based on the Secured Overnight Financing Rate (SOFR) plus a variable spread, along with a front-end fee of 0.25 percent.

Bangladesh-IsDB sign $241.3m deal for resilient infrastructure

Bangladesh has entered into a $241.3 million financing deal with the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) to build five climate-resilient bridges in the Mymensingh division. The project, titled "Construction of Five Climate-Resilient Bridges in Mymensingh Division, Bangladesh," will be carried out by the Roads and Highways Department, operating under the Road Transport and Highways Division.

According to a statement from the Economic Relations Division (ERD), the bridges aim to enhance road connectivity and improve socio-economic access in underserved, flood-prone regions—particularly in the Sunamganj–Jamalpur and Shyamganj–Durgapur border zones, which are frequently affected by river erosion and seasonal flooding.

Designed to endure climate-related stresses, the new structures will ensure year-round accessibility, reduce travel times, and benefit thousands of rural residents, the statement added. The agreement was formalised on May 21 during the IsDB Group's annual gathering in Algiers, Algeria, with Md Shahriar Kader Siddiky, ERD Secretary, and Rami Ahmad, Vice President of the IsDB, serving as signatories.

Among the distinguished attendees were Mohammad Hasan Arif, Bangladesh's alternate governor to the IsDB; Rashed Ahmed, chargé d'affaires at the Bangladesh Embassy in Algiers; and Muhammad Sulaiman Al Jasser, Chairman of the IsDB. "This investment is about more than just physical infrastructure—it represents a commitment to uplift communities in climate-vulnerable regions," the ERD noted.

The initiative is aligned with Bangladesh's climate resilience agenda, as reflected in its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and Vision 2041 roadmap. Once operational, the bridges are expected to significantly enhance the flow of goods and people, facilitate regional commerce, and support rural economies, particularly in farming and cottage industries, the ERD said.

EIB pledges €350m for Bangladesh's renewable energy push

The European Investment Bank (EIB) has pledged €350m in loan financing to bolster renewable energy development in Bangladesh. In addition, the European Union will provide €45m in grant support, further reinforcing Bangladesh's efforts toward a sustainable and climate-resilient future.

The announcement was made on the sidelines of the 58th Annual Meeting of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), held in Tbilisi, Georgia, where Bangladesh held a series of high-level bilateral discussions with major international development partners.

According to a statement from the Ministry of Finance, the funding will contribute to green energy projects that support the country's commitments under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and national climate adaptation strategies. During a bilateral meeting on May 4, Bangladesh's Finance Adviser Dr. Salehuddin Ahmed met with EIB President Nadia Calviño to explore expanding the bank's support in areas critical to Bangladesh's economic transformation.

The EIB, which serves as the European Union's lending arm, has been engaged in Bangladesh since 2000. To date, it has committed over €635 million to six ongoing projects in key sectors, including healthcare, water supply, transportation, and digital communications.

While the EIB primarily serves EU countries, it plays a crucial role in external development cooperation, especially in financing climate resilience, infrastructure upgrades, innovation, and support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in more than 160 countries.

During the discussions, Dr. Ahmed stressed the importance of scaled-up concessional financing — loans offered at below-market rates — to address challenges in human capital development and infrastructure investment, especially as Bangladesh prepares to graduate from its Least Developed Country (LDC) status.

Dr. Ahmed also held separate meetings with senior officials from the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC), which has invested in key initiatives including the Detailed Area Plan (DAP)-II, the Ghorasal Polash Urea Fertiliser Project, and the Meghnaghat Power Plant. In addition, the Bangladesh delegation met with representatives from the ADB, OPEC Fund, and the Agriculture Innovation Mechanism for Scale, reflecting the country's broader engagement to mobilize strategic international financing for sustainable development.

BEPZA secures $480m investment in FY25

The Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (BEPZA) has attracted US$480 million in investments from 32 domestic and foreign companies during the current fiscal year up to May 13, reaffirming its critical role in advancing Bangladesh's industrial and export-oriented development.

The investments are directed towards various enterprises operating within the country's Export Processing Zones (EPZs) and the BEPZA Economic Zone (EZ), underscoring growing investor confidence in Bangladesh's special economic zones. As part of this investment momentum, BEPZA signed a lease agreement on May 13 with Qingdao Dongfang Packaging Technology Limited, a Chinese firm, to establish a packaging and accessories manufacturing facility at the Ishwardi EPZ.

The agreement was formalized at a ceremony held at the BEPZA Complex in Dhaka. Major General Abul Kalam Mohammad Ziaur Rahman, Executive Chairman of BEPZA, was present as chief guest. The lease agreement was signed by Md Ashraful Kabir, Member (Investment Promotion) of BEPZA, and Song Shiliang, Chairman of Qingdao Dongfang Packaging, representing their respective organizations.

Qingdao Dongfang will invest US$4.5 million to produce 5.25 million dozen poly bags, hang tags, and paper tags annually. The project is expected to create employment opportunities for 240 Bangladeshi workers.

In his remarks, BEPZA's Executive Chairman thanked the Chinese company for selecting Ishwardi EPZ as their production hub and highlighted BEPZA's continued commitment to offering a secure, investment-friendly environment. He encouraged Qingdao Dongfang and other Chinese firms to explore broader opportunities in Bangladesh's expanding manufacturing sector.

Over 90% of Women in Bangladesh work in informal sector: Study

More than 90 percent of working women in Bangladesh are employed in the informal sector, which was especially hard-hit during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a new study.

The findings were presented at a seminar titled *Strengthening Systems for Pandemic Preparedness among Working Women Living in Informal Settlements in Urban Bangladesh.* The event was jointly organised by icddr,b, the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, and SickKids, Canada, with funding from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada.

Held at the Sasakawa Auditorium of icddr,b in Dhaka, the seminar brought together key stakeholders to discuss the results of the Women RISE study and their policy implications. Led by Dr Sohana Shafique, the study used a mixed-methods approach to assess the experiences of working women in informal settlements and factories in Dhaka and Gazipur before and during the pandemic.

"I believe the results of this study will help us prepare for any future pandemic," said Dr Tahmeed Ahmed, executive director of icddr,b. "We should remain vigilant, as COVID-19 cases are increasing again, and continue refining and improving our interventions."

Dr Sohana highlighted the vulnerabilities of women in urban slums and factories, as well as gaps in urban health services. She also noted the positive outcomes achieved through targeted interventions.

Additional Secretary of the Health Ministry Mohammad Nora Alam Siddique urged that the findings be shared with policymakers. "The ministry is committed to working with cross-sectional groups to improve these systems," he said. Dr Tahmina Shirin, director of IEDCR, underscored the importance of evidence-based collaboration to strengthen pandemic resilience and expand social protection for urban poor working women.

The research showed significant improvements following targeted interventions. Knowledge about respiratory infection exposure routes increased by 29.6 percent overall, with a 36.3 percent increase among informal sector workers. Preventive practices improved by 16 percent overall, while knowledge of social safety net program registration rose by 16.3 percent among informal workers.



Dietary diversity among working women improved by 11.6 percent overall, with formal sector workers seeing a 22.3 percent increase. Additionally, knowledge of gender-based violence (GBV) services rose by 23.4 percent overall, with a 28.5 percent rise among informal workers. The project applied systems thinking and gender-transformative approaches at multiple levels to develop and evaluate an intervention aimed at enhancing pandemic preparedness for working women.

Bangladesh's food processing industry reached $8b market value: USDA

Bangladesh's food processing industry has reached a market value of $8 billion, growing at an annual rate of 8 percent, according to a recent United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) report. The sector's rapid expansion is being driven by the rise of an urban middle class and evolving consumer lifestyles, creating new export opportunities for U.S. food ingredient suppliers.

The USDA's latest Exporter Guide Annual Report, released on June 16, highlighted that Bangladesh imported $2.1 billion worth of consumer-oriented agricultural products from global markets in 2024. U.S. products accounted for just $12.7 million of that total, representing less than one percent of the market.

Around 1,000 companies operate in Bangladesh's food processing sector, producing a diverse range of products, including snacks, ready-to-eat meals, frozen foods, dairy products, and beverages. Local companies are ramping up investments to meet demand both at home and abroad, resulting in a highly competitive industry.

Lifestyle shifts from higher incomes, urbanisation, and more women entering the workforce are driving demand for processed goods such as juices, chocolates, nuts, tea, dairy products, bakery items, and convenient ready-to-eat foods.

In 2024, U.S. exports to Bangladesh in this category were led by dairy products at $4.8 million, followed by tree nuts at $4 million, food preparations at $2.7 million, condiments and sauces at $0.5 million, and processed vegetables at $0.18 million.

Bangladesh's dairy market alone is worth about $3 billion, with domestic milk production of 14 million tonnes supporting the liquid segment and 311,000 tonnes of imported dairy products serving value-added production.

However, the USDA report noted that high tariffs remain a significant barrier. Total tax incidence on dairy products can range from 31 to 58.6 percent, while food preparations face duties of up to 89.32 percent. Medjool dates and fruit juices are also subject to high tariffs, despite growing demand.

Consumers in Bangladesh are becoming increasingly health-conscious, with rising interest in natural and nutritious products. Nonetheless, challenges such as high duties, weak cold chain infrastructure, and customs bottlenecks continue to hamper trade.

Bangladesh's toy industry is rising from backyard workshops to a billion-dollar sector

Amid the bright colors and cheerful displays at Toy Show 2025, a quiet but powerful industrial transformation is taking place. Held at InterContinental Dhaka, the three-day event has become a symbol of Bangladesh's pivot from toy import dependence to growing export potential.

Jointly organized by the Bangladesh Plastic Goods Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BPGMEA), the Ministry of Commerce, and the Export Competitiveness for Jobs (EC4J) project, the exhibition features over 40 local manufacturers showcasing the innovation and scale of Bangladesh's emerging toy industry.



BPGMEA President Shamim Ahmed remarked, "We're not just making toys—we're reshaping Bangladesh's industrial future." Once dismissed as a low-value, cottage industry, the plastic sector is now gaining serious momentum. Even established RMG exporters are entering the field, drawn by its high growth and employment potential.

The domestic plastic toy market is now worth over Tk 12,000 crore, employing more than 300,000 people directly and indirectly, with 152+ factories operating nationwide. Export figures speak volumes—plastic product exports rose from $15.3 million in FY17 to $77 million in FY23, reflecting an impressive 24% annual growth rate.

Leading this export surge is the toy industry. Sonic (Bangladesh) Ltd, operating from the Nilphamari Export Processing Zone, exported $43 million worth of toys in FY24. The company plans to expand operations with three new factories in Dinajpur, aiming to add 20,000 new jobs, many of which will go to women.

Other players are following suit. Zihan Plastic Industries, based in Keraniganj, produces 220 toy items and expects to more than double its export revenue from $100,000 to $250,000 this year. ACI Premio Plastics, which already exports $1.2 million worth of toys annually to Saudi Arabia, Bhutan, and India, also commands a robust domestic market worth Tk 30 crore per month.

"We employ over 500 people—80% of whom are women," said Kallan Biswas, senior export manager at ACI Premio. "Toys are light work, and our women workers are highly skilled and productive."

According to BPGMEA, cumulative investment in the sector has already crossed Tk 7,600 crore, with each factory averaging Tk 50 crore in investment. Foreign investors, including those from Hong Kong, are increasingly setting up production hubs in places like Nilphamari, inspired by models such as India's Gujarat polymer cluster.

Yet challenges persist. Ahmed noted that some export-oriented firms are barred from selling locally due to policy restrictions, despite growing domestic demand. Other hurdles include poor trade logistics, limited resin production capacity, and a need for greater regulatory support.

Still, optimism prevails. With the right policy push, Ahmed believes Bangladesh could become one of the world's top three plastic-product exporters within a decade. "This is more than just an export story," he said. "It's about empowering rural women, creating jobs beyond garments, and proving that Bangladesh can be a producer, not just a buyer."

RMG exports to non-traditional markets increased by 6.7%

Bangladesh's readymade garment (RMG) exports to non-traditional markets rose 6.79% year-on-year to $6.04 billion between July and May of the current fiscal year, according to Export Promotion Bureau data compiled by the BGMEA. Non-traditional destinations refer to all markets excluding the EU, US, UK, and Canada.

Within these newer markets, exports to India jumped 17.35%, Turkey surged by 31.75%, and Japan grew by 10.32%. However, shipments to Russia, South Korea, the UAE, and Malaysia saw declines over the same period.

The EU continued to dominate as Bangladesh's largest RMG buyer, taking 49.91% of shipments worth $18.25 billion. The US was the second largest market with $7.03 billion in exports, up 19.23% year-on-year. Exports to Canada and the



UK stood at $1.20 billion and $4.04 billion, growing by 14.14% and 3.96% respectively.

Within the EU, Germany remained the biggest customer, importing $4.58 billion in apparel, followed by Spain at $3.16 billion and France at $2.00 billion. By product category, knitwear exports posted robust growth of 10.98%, while woven garments rose by 9.30%.

In total, Bangladesh's RMG exports reached $36.56 billion during July–May, reflecting a 10.20% rise compared to the same period a year earlier, despite the challenging global trade environment.

Walton expands global footprint with Singapore distributorship agreement

Walton Hi-Tech Industries PLC has taken a significant step in its global expansion strategy by appointing Singapore-based Flair M&E Pte Ltd as its exclusive distributor in Singapore for the next five years.

The formal agreement was signed on 19 May and came into immediate effect, according to a disclosure published on the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) website. Under this partnership, Flair M&E — a privately held company registered in Singapore — will be responsible for the distribution, marketing, and sales of Walton's full range of products across the city-state.

Following the announcement, Walton's share price experienced a modest increase of 0.47 percent, closing at Tk 407 on the DSE. Abdur Rouf, Head of Global Business at Walton, remarked that the agreement is part of the company's strategic roadmap to enhance its global market presence. "This collaboration strengthens our footprint in Asia and supports our vision of promoting Bangladeshi innovation worldwide," he said.

Walton currently exports electronics and appliances to 67 countries, including major markets such as the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, and India. The company sells under its own brand in 41 of these markets, including India, Mexico, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, and Vietnam, offering a comprehensive product portfolio that includes refrigerators, televisions, air conditioners, and other home appliances.

Looking ahead, Walton aims to build a direct brand presence in 150 countries by 2030, as part of its ambition to elevate the global profile of Bangladeshi manufacturing. Despite its strategic progress in international markets, the company's recent financial performance has shown signs of pressure. Walton reported a net profit of Tk 392 crore for the January–March quarter of FY25, compared to Tk 422 crore in the same period last year. Earnings per share (EPS) declined to Tk 12.94 from Tk 13.93 year-on-year.

For the first nine months of FY25, Walton's cumulative net profit stood at Tk 696 crore, reflecting an 8.5 percent decline from the corresponding period in the previous fiscal year. Walton's continued global outreach represents a shift in Bangladesh's export landscape, signaling the rise of high-tech manufacturing alongside traditional sectors.

Bangladesh to begin mango export to China

Bangladesh exported mango to China for the first time on May 28, according to Agriculture Secretary Dr Mohammad Emdad Ullah Mian. He revealed this information at a press briefing at the Foreign Service Academy here this afternoon. Emdad Ullah said about 50 metric tonnes of mangoes will be exported to China this year, while talks are on with Chinese provisional governments and the Chinese Ambassador in Dhaka to export more mangoes to China.

Besides, he said, the agriculture ministry has taken various initiatives to explore more international markets for Bangladeshi mangoes.

The agriculture secretary said Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus at a meeting on 21 May directed them to explore new international markets for mangoes by assessing country-specific need and demand of mangoes.

He said a big initiative regarding mango is going to be taken by the agriculture ministry, which will be visible soon. In addition, Emdad Ullah said the government has taken steps to export Bangladeshi jackfruits to China. About 27 lakh metric tonnes of mangoes is produced in the country each year, he said, adding that mango is a seasonal fruit and activities are underway to export mangoes abroad.



He said about 31,100 metric tonnes of mangoes was exported in 2022-23, while 1,321 tonnes in 2023-24. On the other hand, he

said, mango production was 27 lakh metric tonnes in 2022-23 and 24.5 lakh metric tonnes in 2023-24. The agriculture secretary said Bangladesh produces on average 25 lakh metric tonnes of mangoes each year while it exports 1,000 to 3,000 metric tonnes. There is a demand of Bangladeshi mangoes around the world as it is delicious to eat, he said.

Earlier, in March 2025, China expressed its interest to import mango, guava and jackfruit from Bangladesh.

Starlink officially launches in Bangladesh

Starlink has officially started its internet services in Bangladesh. The news was shared on 20 May in a Facebook post by Faiz Ahmad Taiyeb, the Special Assistant to the Chief Adviser.

He said Starlink is starting with two internet packages—Residence and Residence Lite. The monthly fee is Tk 6,000 for the regular package and Tk 4,200 for the Lite version. To get started, users will need to pay a one-time setup cost of Tk 47,000 for the necessary equipment.

Good news for users—there are no data or speed limits. You can use unlimited internet with speeds of up to 300 Mbps. People in Bangladesh can start ordering the service from 20 May.

"This service will help businesses grow in areas where fiber or high-speed internet is still unavailable," said Faiz Ahmad Taiyeb. "NGOs, freelancers, and entrepreneurs will now get fast and reliable internet all year round."

The interim government has given permission to Starlink, the



satellite internet company owned by Elon Musk's SpaceX, to operate in Bangladesh

ShopUp and Sary merge to form SILQ with $110m Saudi-US investment

Bangladesh's largest B2B commerce platform, ShopUp, and Gulf-based



leading B2B marketplace Sary have merged to form SILQ Group, creating the region's largest B2B commerce platform. The new entity aims to serve fast-growing consumer markets across Gulf and Emerging Asia.

The merger is supported by a $110 million funding round led by Sanabil Investments, owned by Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF), and Peter Thiel's Valar Ventures. The investment includes both equity funding and a financing facility for SILQ Financial, the group's financial services arm.

Together, ShopUp and Sary have served over 600,000 retailers, restaurants, hotels, and wholesalers, facilitating more than $5b in transactions, $750m in financing, and over 100m shipments.

SILQ will offer a powerful platform that integrates commerce, logistics, and financing to help businesses grow efficiently. While ShopUp and Sary will retain their brand identities in their respective markets, they will operate under the broader SILQ infrastructure, leveraging shared technology and capabilities.

Afeef Zaman, Founder & CEO of ShopUp, will serve as the CEO of SILQ Group, while Mohammed Aldossary, Founder & CEO of Sary, will head SILQ Financial.

SILQ is backed by a stellar group of global investors, including Flourish Ventures, MSA Capital, Prosus, Tiger Global, Peak XV, STV, Raed Ventures, and Wafra Investment. This landmark merger sets the stage for transforming B2B commerce across some of the world's most dynamic markets.

Nearly 400,000 Bangladeshi children remain under-immunised: UN agencies

Despite significant progress in immunisation coverage over the past decades, Bangladesh still has nearly 400,000 under-immunised children and 70,000 children with zero vaccine doses, according to a joint statement released by Unicef, WHO, and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, marking the launch of World Immunization Week 2025.

The joint release acknowledged that the Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) in Bangladesh has achieved notable success since its inception in 1979, increasing full vaccination coverage from just 2 percent to over 81.6 percent. However, gaps remain—particularly among children in urban areas, where only 79 percent are fully immunised, 2.4 percent have received no vaccines at all, and 9.8 percent are partially immunised. In

contrast, rural coverage stands at a slightly higher 85 percent.

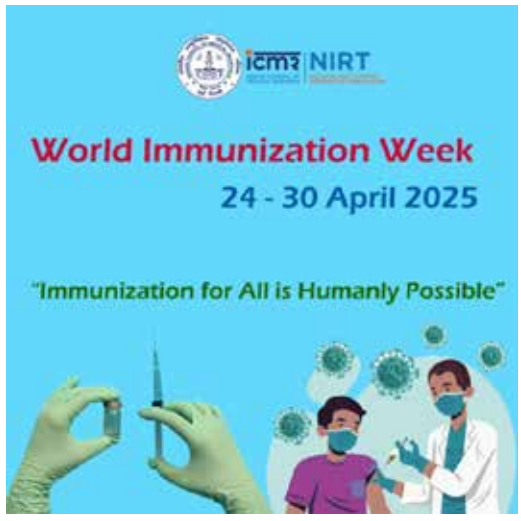
The agencies stressed that these figures reflect ongoing inequities in healthcare access, especially in urban slums and hard-to-reach regions, where children remain vulnerable to vaccine-preventable diseases.

"While Bangladesh has made extraordinary strides in immunisation, reaching the last mile—particularly in densely populated and underserved communities—requires renewed urgency and targeted investment," said Stanley Gwavuya, Officer-in-Charge of Unicef Bangladesh. The EPI programme is estimated to save 94,000 lives annually and prevents approximately five million illnesses among children, offering a remarkable $25 return on every dollar invested, the statement added.

The challenges are particularly acute for the 70,000 zero-dose children who have not received even a single vaccine. These children, along with the under-immunised, represent a significant portion of preventable child mortality in low- and middle-income countries.

Ahmed Jamshed Mohamed, WHO Representative in Bangladesh, praised the resilience of the national health system. "Bangladesh's consistent immunisation gains—even during times of crisis—highlight the effective leadership of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and the dedication of its health workers," he noted.

Sam Muller, Regional Head for Core Countries at Gavi, stressed the importance of sustained funding. "Investing in immunisation is more urgent than ever to ensure health



security and protect communities from disease outbreaks," he said. The three organisations called on the government to strengthen the immunisation programme further by ensuring adequate human resources, funding, and equitable access to vaccines across all regions.

Bangladesh's GDP Growth falls to 3.97% in FY25, lowest since pandemic

Bangladesh's economy expanded by 3.97% in FY2024–25, marking its lowest growth rate since the pandemic-struck FY2020, according to provisional data released by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) on 27 May. The figure falls short of the government's 5.25% target and is slightly lower than the previous year's 4.22% growth.



During the COVID-19 outbreak in FY2020, GDP growth had dipped to 3.45%, making this year's slowdown the weakest recovery period since then. The provisional data reveals sluggish performance in the agriculture and services sectors, although the industrial sector posted a modest rebound, driven mainly by improvements in manufacturing.

Development partners had earlier anticipated a downturn in growth due to political uncertainties and slower investment momentum. Their forecasts closely align with the current estimate: the World Bank projected 3.3%, the IMF 3.8%, and the Asian Development Bank 3.9%. In terms of value, GDP at current prices stood at Tk55.52 trillion (approx. $462 billion) in FY25, up from Tk50.02 trillion ($450 billion) in FY24.

Agriculture suffered a significant slowdown, with growth shrinking to 1.79% from 3.30% a year earlier. Analysts attribute this to natural calamities, including last year's floods that damaged crops like Aman paddy. Industry showed signs of recovery, growing 4.34%, compared to 3.51% last year. This improvement is largely attributed to the textile and garments sector, though experts remain cautious due to stagnant performance in construction. The

services sector, which remains the largest contributor to GDP, grew by 4.51%, slightly down from 5.09% in FY24, reflecting weakened momentum in wholesale, transport, and other service-related activities.

The investment-to-GDP ratio decreased to 29.38% in FY25, compared to 30.70% in FY24. Domestic savings declined to 23.25%, while national savings rose marginally to 29.01%. Despite these trends, per capita income rose to approximately $2,820, a $82 increase from last year's $2,738, according to the BBS.

Economist Dr Zahid Hussain, former World Bank lead economist in Dhaka, noted that agricultural output was adversely affected by natural disasters. He also pointed out that while manufacturing has performed relatively better, the industrial growth figures appear overly optimistic, especially considering weak construction activity and falling capital machinery imports.

He raised concerns about inconsistencies in public investment figures, questioning how Tk38.29 trillion in public investment was estimated when actual state and SOE investments were significantly lower. "Such gaps raise questions—not of manipulation, but of overestimation or flawed projection methods," he remarked.

Professor Selim Raihan of Dhaka University echoed similar views, adding that the methodology used for GDP estimates still relies heavily on assumptions due to the lack of real-time, verifiable data. He stressed the need for an independent data commission to ensure transparency and credibility in official economic statistics.

Raihan, who is also Executive Director of SANEM, further noted that although recent export performance explains the rise in industrial growth, inadequate data updates and outdated methods continue to undermine the reliability of GDP figures.

At least 6.2m hectares needed to sustain rice production: BRRI Director

Bangladesh must preserve at least 6.2 million hectares of land for paddy cultivation to maintain its current level of rice production, according to Md Rafiqul Islam, Director for Research at the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI). Currently, the total area under paddy cultivation stands at around 11.7 million hectares, he added.

Islam made these remarks while inaugurating BRRI's 24/7 call center on June 25 at the institute's office in Gazipur. The service aims to provide farmers with round-the-clock advice on fertilizer use, weed control, pest management, and irrigation. By calling 09644300300, farmers can directly consult with BRRI scientists for solutions to their agricultural queries, he explained.

Highlighting the pressures on land, Islam noted that per capita landholding in Bangladesh was 20% in 1971, but has since fallen to 10%. Over that same period, the country's population has increased 2.5 times, while food production has grown fourfold. He emphasized that about 25% of the country's arable land still remains fallow and should be brought under cultivation.



In response to a question, Islam said BRRI developed 37 rice varieties between 1971 and 1990 in its first research phase, and 84 varieties between 1991 and 2024. "We are now focusing on developing rice varieties enriched with zinc, iron, and other micronutrients. Additionally, we have preserved 9,600 indigenous rice varieties, which serve as valuable research material," he said.

BRRI Director General Mohammad Khalequzzaman added that farmers are facing increased losses from rice cultivation due to adverse weather. The call center has been launched to help guide them through these challenges, he said. BRRI has developed 121 rice varieties since 1970, including eight hybrid varieties, he added.

US Cotton market share declines in Bangladesh amid shipping hurdles

The United States is rapidly losing ground in Bangladesh's cotton import market due to shipping delays and logistical inefficiencies, according to a recent report by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA).

In the 2023–24 marketing year, which began in August, Bangladesh imported 7.8 million bales of cotton. However, US cotton comprised only 9% of these imports, down from 10% the previous year. The first seven months of the current marketing

year (MY25) show an even sharper decline: US cotton accounted for just 6% of total imports, compared to 11% during the same period last year.

The USDA report points to lengthy shipping durations and rigid transit terms as key barriers. Unlike their US counterparts, many merchants selling South American and West African cotton offer in-transit sales and utilize nearby warehouses in Malaysia, Singapore, and Sri Lanka, enabling delivery to Bangladesh within seven days. In contrast, US cotton is typically not sold while in transit and takes significantly longer to arrive.

This logistical disadvantage has allowed Brazil, West Africa, and India to gain substantial market share. In the first seven months of MY25, West African nations supplied 1.9 million bales (41% share), Brazil shipped 970,487 bales (20%), and India exported 887,600 bales (19%).

Although Bangladeshi mills prefer US cotton for its superior quality, shipping delays have forced many to opt for more accessible alternatives.



In response, the Bangladeshi government is considering a bonded warehousing facility to allow duty-free entry of US cotton, which may help regain lost market share.

This trend coincides with the Trump administration's recent 37% tariff hike on Bangladeshi exports, raising concerns among local exporters. Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus has reached out to the US government, offering to increase imports of US agricultural goods, including cotton, to improve trade relations.

Despite recent political unrest and the ousting of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government in August 2024, Bangladesh's ready-made garment (RMG) sector is showing signs of recovery. With law and order restored, international buyers have resumed orders, and the USDA projects cotton imports to rise to 8.2 million bales in MY26, reflecting a 1.2% year-on-year increase.

Bangladesh resumes fragrant rice exports with strict conditions

Bangladesh has resumed the export of fragrant rice after a six-month suspension, as the Ministry of Commerce approved 133 companies to export between 100 and 500 tonnes per shipment, depending on capacity.



The decision, formalised in a letter to the Chief Import and Export Controller on 8 April, sets strict conditions. Exporters must sell at a minimum price of $1.6 per kg (approximately Tk 196), and meet nine regulatory requirements including customs assessment, export volume limits, and a ban on transferring export permissions.

The government had halted all rice exports, including aromatic varieties, in October 2023 due to domestic food security concerns. However, a January 2024 meeting of the Food Planning and Monitoring Committee decided to reopen exports of fragrant rice in a controlled manner.

Bangladesh began exporting aromatic rice in 2009–10 and has since reached over 130 countries, including the UAE, UK, US, Malaysia, and South Korea. The commerce ministry noted that the government reserves the right to halt exports again if necessary.

This move is seen as a way to boost foreign earnings while balancing food security concerns at home.

Bangladesh loses Indian route for third-country exports

In a significant policy shift, the Indian government has withdrawn the transshipment facility that allowed Bangladeshi export goods to be routed through Indian land customs stations to ports or airports for shipment to third countries. The decision, announced via a Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) notification on April 8, cancels the earlier circular from June 29, 2020.

India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) stated the move was necessary due to growing congestion at Indian ports and airports. "The transshipment facility had over time resulted in

significant congestion, logistical delays, and higher costs, negatively impacting India's own exports," the MEA clarified. However, the withdrawal does not affect Bangladeshi exports to Nepal or Bhutan transiting through Indian territory.

The decision is expected to disrupt the flow of Bangladeshi ready-made garments (RMG) through Indian gateways, particularly Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi, which handles 20–30 truckloads of Bangladeshi goods daily.

The Apparel Export Promotion Council (AEPC) of India had been lobbying for the removal, citing direct competition with Bangladeshi textile exports. AEPC Chairman Sudhir Sekhri said the move will support Indian exporters amid ongoing maritime disruptions caused by the Red Sea crisis and piracy, which have pushed many to shift from sea to air transport.



However, Ajay Srivastava, founder of the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI), warned the decision could violate WTO rules, particularly Article V of GATT 1994, which guarantees the right of free transit for landlocked nations without unnecessary restrictions. The suspension, while aimed at easing India's port pressure, may strain regional trade logistics and raise questions about compliance with global trade obligations.

Bangladesh RMG exports to India hit by land port restrictions

Bangladesh's readymade garment (RMG) exports to India face significant disruptions following India's sudden ban on the import of seven categories of Bangladeshi goods through land ports. The move, which took effect from 17 May, restricts imports of RMG and consumer goods via 13 land border posts across West Bengal and the northeastern states. Exports are now only allowed through Kolkata and Nhava Sheva ports, forcing Bangladeshi exporters to shift to more expensive and time-consuming maritime routes.



India's decision comes in response to Bangladesh's earlier ban on yarn imports from India via land ports. The tit-for-tat restrictions have raised concerns over trade stability and strained bilateral economic relations. Bangladesh exports around US $700 million worth of garments to India annually, with 93% previously routed through land ports. In the first 10 months of the current fiscal year, exports already reached US $563 million.

The Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) warned that rerouting shipments via sea will increase both costs and lead times, adversely affecting competitiveness. BGMEA Administrator Anwar Hossain emphasized the critical role of land ports and urged for bilateral talks to resolve the issue.

Bangladesh's overall trade with India is valued at around US $13 billion, with exports of about US $2 billion. Recent tensions have seen Bangladesh also impose restrictions on Indian yarn and rice imports and increase inspections at borders.

Indian officials argue the restrictions aim to restore trade balance and enhance access to northeastern markets. Bangladesh's interim Commerce Minister Sheikh Bashir Uddin stressed the need to maintain trade flow and indicated that dialogue would follow if necessary.

As the two neighbours navigate this standoff, industry leaders call for urgent diplomatic engagement to protect economic cooperation and regional trade harmony.

Giordano Korea CEO sees Bangladesh as 'Next South Korea' in manufacturing boom

Bangladesh's rising industrial and export sectors are drawing growing interest from South Korea, with Giordano Korea CEO Junseok Han calling the country a reflection of South Korea's economic rise in the 1980s. Visiting Bangladesh for the first time to attend the Bangladesh Investment Summit 2025, Han expressed deep optimism about Bangladesh's potential as a global manufacturing hub.

"This country reminds me of where Korea was 30 to 40 years ago," said Han, speaking to *The Daily Star* after a series of high-level meetings with ministers, business leaders, and professionals. "There's tremendous

opportunity here, especially in manufacturing and exports."

Under Han's leadership, Giordano Korea grew from 2 billion won in 1994 to become Korea's top women's casual wear brand by 2003. Now, Han is eyeing Bangladesh as a key partner in his next phase of global expansion. "This is my first visit to Bangladesh, and I must say I'm deeply impressed," he remarked.

Han highlighted Bangladesh's skilled and competitive workforce as its greatest asset. "The young professionals and factory workers I met are smart, well-educated, and globally aware," he said, comparing today's Bangladesh to Korea's transition period in the 1970s and 80s.

Giordano Korea already sources $5–10 million worth of goods from Bangladesh annually, and Han plans to triple this within the next five years. He confirmed plans to establish a factory in one of the country's economic zones, aiming to produce for both the Korean market and other international destinations.

A visit to Youngone Corporation in Chattogram, one of Bangladesh's top exporters, further solidified his investment plans. "Their production capacity is impressive. It convinced us to expand our procurement footprint here," Han said.

However, he did not shy away from pointing out critical challenges. "Transportation is still inconvenient. Long lead times and limited port infrastructure need urgent improvement. Streamlining logistics and export processes would make a massive difference," he advised.

Han believes Bangladesh has strong prospects not just in garments, but also in electronics assembly and light automotive manufacturing. "Labour costs are competitive, and the industrial base is expanding. The conditions are right for manufacturing-led growth."

He also pointed out the rising interest from Korean conglomerates such as Hyundai, KIA, Samsung, and LG, many of which are already present or exploring the market. "Bangladesh offers a favourable environment for Korean investors looking for long-term growth," he said.



According to Han, representatives from 27 South Korean companies have expressed interest in expanding business in Bangladesh. He credited Youngone Corporation Chairman Kihak Sung as a pioneer and role model for Korean investment in Bangladesh. "If Bangladesh can overcome its infrastructure hurdles, I believe it will not just catch up — it will lead," Han concluded.

Bangladesh pavilion at Expo 2025 Osaka draws foreign investor interest

Bangladesh's pavilion at the World Expo 2025 in Osaka, Japan has



begun turning heads, attracting foreign investors with its compelling showcase of the country's economic potential, investment-friendly climate, and vibrant cultural legacy.

Though the six-month-long expo is still in its early phase, the Bangladesh pavilion has already welcomed visitors from countries such as India and several African nations, with keen interest shown in sectors like ready-made garments (RMG), leather, ICT, health, and renewable energy. Pavilion officials noted that while no formal investment deals have yet been signed, business interest is growing steadily, especially from Japanese trade professionals.

The pavilion builds on the momentum generated by Bangladesh's recent Investment Summit, aiming to convert curiosity into concrete collaborations. Pavilion Director stated that seminars and business matching sessions will be arranged to attract more foreign investors.

Divided into 17 thematic zones and featuring six intricate miniatures, the pavilion presents a rich narrative of Bangladesh's transformation—from its historical struggles to its modern achievements. Visitors can explore the nation's journey through interactive tablets, physical displays, audio-visuals, and a striking LCD giant screen that streams scenes of rural life, festivals, and industrial progress.

Miniature displays titled *'1952-1971-2024: Indomitable Youth Spirit'*, *'Culture and Festivity'*, *'Muslin: The Woven Heritage'*, and *'Industrial Progress of Bangladesh'* offer dioramic glimpses into the country's evolution. Notably, the '2024 Mass Uprising' zone features graffiti art, commemorating recent civic movements and the strength of youth-led change.

Traditional crafts such as Nakshi Kantha, Jamdani, revived Muslin, and jute-based eco-products add cultural depth, while exhibits on pharmaceuticals, green energy, automotive, and IT underline Bangladesh's emerging industrial profile.

The World Expo 2025, held on Osaka Bay's artificial island Yumeshima, runs under the theme "Designing Future Society for Our Lives," with 158 countries participating. Since 1851, World Expositions have served as a global stage for innovation and national branding, and Bangladesh's pavilion stands as a vibrant testament to its rich heritage and future potential.

Bangladesh positions itself as Japan's next big tech partner at IT Week 2025

As Japan IT Week 2025 unfolds in Tokyo from April 23–25, Bangladesh is making a confident and strategic pitch to become Japan's next major partner in the global tech ecosystem. Representing a vibrant and rapidly expanding ICT sector, Bangladesh comes with a message of partnership, innovation, and mutual growth.

From humble beginnings, Bangladesh's ICT industry has evolved into a $1.4 billion export sector, with services reaching over 80 countries, including Japan. The government has set ambitious targets—$5 billion in ICT exports by 2027 and $50 billion by 2041—driven by a robust policy framework, modern infrastructure, and a highly skilled workforce.

Central to this growth is Bangladesh's youthful population—over 60% of the country's 180 million people are under 35. Each year, more than 20,000 IT graduates enter the job market, supported by another 30,000 trained in cutting-edge fields like cloud computing, cybersecurity, data science, and UI/UX design. Bangladesh ranks among the top 10 nations in producing computer science graduates and is the second-largest supplier of online freelance services globally, according to the Oxford Internet Institute.

To better align with Japanese market needs, Bangladesh has launched Japanese language and cultural training programmes in Dhaka, Chattogram, and Rajshahi. Hundreds of Bangladeshi tech professionals have already attained JLPT N3 or higher proficiency, easing integration into Japanese corporate structures.

Bangladesh's ICT exports to Japan rose from $56 million in FY 2016–17 to $120 million in FY 2021–22, with over 100 companies now engaged in direct or subcontracted projects. Key areas of collaboration include embedded systems, mobile applications, and enterprise software. Japanese firms have also begun setting up remote development teams and back-office operations in Bangladesh.



This growing partnership is backed by Bangladesh's "Digital Transformation" agenda, spearheaded by the ICT Division. The country now boasts 29 high-tech parks and software zones offering tax holidays, duty-free capital equipment imports, and 100% profit repatriation. Foreign investors benefit from fast-track services by the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA). A recent JETRO survey found that 71.6% of Japanese firms in Bangladesh plan to expand, citing improved regulatory conditions and talent availability.

With consistent GDP growth above 6% and a $450 billion economy, Bangladesh's burgeoning middle class is also driving digital adoption. Sectors like fintech, health-tech, and e-commerce are flourishing, with over 1,500 active startups and venture capital investments surpassing $250 million in a year.

As Japan seeks to fill its tech talent gap, Bangladesh offers world-class capabilities, cost efficiency, and a spirit of collaboration. Japan IT Week 2025 is not just a trade fair—it's a bridge. And Bangladesh is ready to walk across it, side by side with Japan.

Bangladesh set to remain top global cotton importer in MY26

Bangladesh is projected to retain its position as the world's leading cotton importer in the upcoming 2025–2026 marketing year, according to the latest forecast by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

The USDA's *Cotton: World Markets and Trade* report estimates that Bangladesh will import around

8.5 million bales of raw cotton in Marketing Year 2026 (MY26), which begins this August. This reflects a continued upward trend from 8.2 million bales projected in MY25 and 7.5 million bales in MY24.

In comparison, Vietnam is expected to import 8 million bales in the same



period, while China's imports are forecast to drop sharply to 7 million bales—down from 15 million bales in MY24. Bangladesh has consistently led the global cotton import market, with historical volumes of 8.45 million bales in MY22 and 7 million bales in MY23, reinforcing its central role in the global textile value chain.

A recent USDA report released on March 31 also attributes this sustained demand to robust growth in Bangladesh's ready-made garments (RMG) industry. Export data from the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) shows that RMG shipments rose by 10.86 percent year-on-year, reaching US$30.25 billion during July–April of FY2024–25.

Currently, West African cotton dominates Bangladesh's import basket, accounting for 37 percent, followed by India (23 percent), Brazil (17 percent), and the United States (9 percent). US exporters continue to target Bangladesh as a growth market.

Recent regulatory changes are expected to ease trade flows further. In April, Bangladesh lifted its dual fumigation requirement for US cotton imports, a move that cuts import costs and shortens lead times. This followed temporary relief from a proposed 37 percent US tariff, which has been paused for a 90-day review period.

Mohammad Hatem, President of the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA), emphasized that expanding imports of US cotton could help narrow the bilateral trade gap and strengthen Bangladesh's appeal for preferential trade access to the American market.

Hatem also noted that domestic cotton production remains minimal—just 153,000 bales across 45,000 hectares—meeting less than 2 percent of national demand. Imported cotton remains vital to the country's spinning and knitwear sectors. The USDA's outlook further solidifies Bangladesh's position as a key player in global apparel manufacturing and a pivotal hub in the international cotton trade.

Bangladesh needs more time for fully flexible exchange rate, says IMF

Bangladesh is currently going through a transition towards a fully flexible exchange rate regime, and the process may take time, said the International Monetary Fund (IMF). But both the authorities and the market must brace for the change, said the multilateral lender at a virtual press briefing on 29 June.

Chris Papageorgiou, IMF mission chief for Bangladesh, said the country had entered a transitional phase as part of its economic reform commitments under the IMF credit programme. In May, the Bangladesh Bank introduced a more flexible exchange rate system to meet conditions tied to the IMF's $5.5 billion loan package. However, an unofficial band continues to run in the foreign currency market. "The design of this crawling peg with a band aims to provide the flexibility that is needed right now," said Papageorgiou.

The IMF arranged the briefing following the Executive Board's completion of the combined third and fourth reviews of Bangladesh's reform programme. The support comes under three arrangements — the Extended Fund Facility, the Extended Credit Facility, and the Resilience and Sustainability Facility.

Asked about the new exchange rate mechanism, Papageorgiou described the crawling peg with a band as a stopgap measure. "It is not a fully flexible exchange rate; it is a system designed to gradually achieve full flexibility in the future," he said. "The reason for designing the reform this way is that we recognise Bangladesh is at a stage in its development where a transitional regime is beneficial."

He said the end goal is to achieve a fully flexible exchange rate as the economy continues to mature. "Of course, all of this needs to be part of a strategy that we will support, but which must ultimately be owned by the Bangladesh Bank," he added. Regarding inflation, Papageorgiou said taming rising prices had been a key focus since the beginning of the IMF programme, as consumer inflation had remained stubbornly high.

"We saw food inflation reach 14.5 percent and overall inflation near 12 percent. There is now some encouraging news that inflation is on a downward trend." Headline inflation has come down to 9 percent, but he cautioned that this was still far from comfortable. "We are not satisfied with such levels of inflation," he said, welcoming the tight monetary policy by the authorities and efforts to bring inflation within the 5 to 6 percent target range.

"We must remain vigilant because other shocks could affect the economy — for example, a potential oil shock stemming from the war in the Middle East." While such external shocks may or may not arise, Papageorgiou said that recent reforms, particularly around the exchange rate, had created some cushion for the economy.

Global/Regional News

Developing countries should fast-track US trade deals: WB president

Developing countries should strike swift trade deals with the United States at the "earliest possible" opportunity, the president of the World Bank told AFP on 25 April, after a busy week with global financial leaders in Washington. Ajay Banga was interviewed by AFP at the World Bank and International Monetary Fund's Spring Meetings, which have been held this year under a cloud of uncertainty about President Donald Trump's stop-start tariff rollout.

The Bank has been advising developing countries to get a deal done quickly with the United States, and to then focus attention on cutting trade barriers and boosting regional flows of goods, Banga said. "You need to negotiate trade systems with the US at the earliest possible (opportunity)," he said. "If you delay, it hurts everyone."

Trump's tariffs have roiled financial markets, sent volatility surging and spooked investors and consumers. Since returning to office in January, the US leader has imposed a "baseline" 10 percent tariff on most countries, with much higher duties on China, and 25 percent sector-specific levies on areas including steel, aluminum, and automobiles not manufactured in the United States.

He also introduced much higher tariffs on dozens of countries -- which have since been temporarily paused -- accusing them of having an unfair trade balance with the United States. Banga also addressed the criticism leveled by US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent at the Bank.

Bessent criticized China's "absurd" developing country status and called on Banga and IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva to "earn the confidence of the administration." "I don't think he's wrong," Banga said of Bessent's comments on China.

"A country that is the size of China and the capability of China, at some point, should no longer be taking money from IBRD," he said, referring to the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development -- an arm of the World Bank that lends largely to middle-income countries.

Such a move would require the support of the World Bank's executive board, which is made up by member states. China, Banga said, borrowed around $750 million from the IBRD last year, while paying billions of dollars to the institution in repayments and donations.

"My view is, I've brought it down to 750 (million), and I'm trying to figure out a way to deal with China to bring it down further," he said. "I want to get it done. And that's what I'm talking to the Chinese about." Banga said the Trump administration's criticisms of the World Bank, which included "expansive policy overreach," were not unusual, citing newly elected governments in countries including France, Japan and Korea.

"I keep telling people this is a perfectly constructive request, to say, tell me and show me that you guys are the kind of people that advance the interests of my taxpayer, of my country," he said. "I take it in that spirit," he said. "There's nothing wrong with it." Since taking the helm of the Washington-based development lender in 2023, Banga has pushed to streamline operations and encourage private sector participation, while focusing on job creation and electricity connectivity.

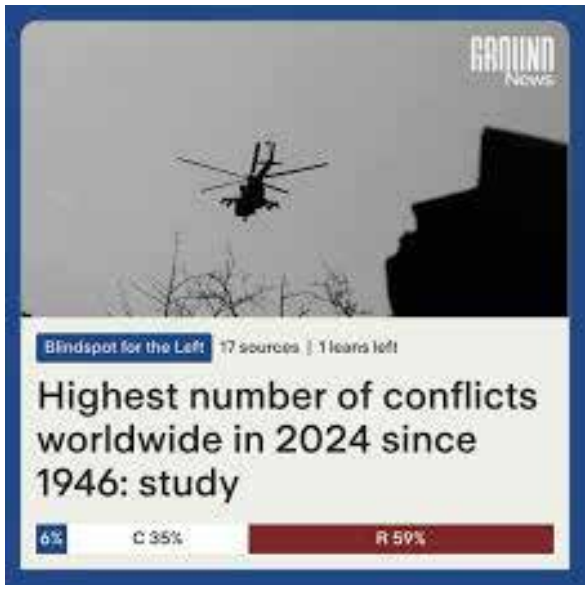


Among the Bank's current priorities is a push with the African Development Bank to connect 300 million people in sub-Saharan Africa to electricity by 2030 -- a process that will require a vast amount of new energy to be brought online. "You should try and get (energy) in the best, accessible way and the lowest possible cost," Banga said, suggesting that in addition to renewable power, nuclear and gas could help provide a base load -- two energy sources the World Bank is currently hesitant to finance.

The Bank's executive board is set to discuss its energy strategy in June, Banga said, adding that funding for both nuclear and gas would likely be on the agenda. Banga said the Bank is also pushing to encourage private sector job creation in developing countries -- beyond simply outsourcing jobs from advanced economies.

Highest Number of conflicts worldwide in 2024 since 1946: Study

The world saw the highest number of armed conflicts in almost 80 years in 2024, dethroning 2023 as a record year, a Norwegian study published 11 June showed, highlighting the risks linked to a US disengagement. Last year, 61 conflicts were registered in the world across 36 countries, with some countries experiencing several simultaneous conflicts, the report by the Peace Research Institute of Oslo (Prio) said.



In 2023, there were 59 conflicts in 34 countries. "This is not just a spike -- it's a structural shift," said Siri Aas Rustad, the main author of the report which covers trends in armed conflicts in the period 1946-2024. "The world today is far more violent, and far more fragmented, than it was a decade ago," she said.

Africa remained the most ravaged continent, with 28 conflicts involving at least one state, followed by Asia with 17, the Middle East with 10, Europe with three and the Americas with two. More than half of these countries experienced two or more conflicts. The number of deaths resulting from fighting remained around the same level as in 2023, at about 129,000, making 2024 the fourth-deadliest year since the end of the Cold War in 1989, the study said.

The death toll was led by the wars in Ukraine and the Gaza Strip, as well as clashes in the Tigray region of Ethiopia. "Now is not the time for the United States -- or any global power -- to retreat from international engagement," Rustad said.

"Isolationism in the face of rising global violence would be a profound mistake with long-term human life consequences," she said, a reference to US President Donald Trump's "America First" campaign. "It is a mistake to assume the world can look away. Whether under President Trump or any future administration, abandoning global solidarity now would mean walking away from the very stability the US helped build after 1945," she said.

The study is based on data compiled by Sweden's Uppsala University.

Wars have now displaced over 122 million people as aid funding falls, UN says

The number of people displaced by war and persecution around the world climbed above 122 million this year due to a failure to resolve multi-year conflicts such as those in Sudan and Ukraine, the U.N. refugee agency said on 12 June. However, it said that funding to help the refugees has fallen to 2015 levels.



There were over 2 million more people displaced globally by the end of April 2025 than there were the previous year despite the return of nearly the same number of Syrians after the collapse of Bashar al-Assad's rule, according to the report by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi.

It attributed the rise to major conflicts in Sudan, Myanmar and Ukraine, and a continued failure to stop the fighting. "We are living in a time of intense volatility in international relations, with modern warfare creating a fragile, harrowing landscape marked by acute human suffering," Grandi said in a statement alongside the report.

Humanitarians complain that a lack of political leadership in brokering peace deals is prolonging conflicts and stretching aid groups seeking to address their impact. The surge in displacement numbers comes as funding to help them has fallen to 2015 levels when the total number of refugees around the world stood at about half current levels, UNHCR said.

U.S. President Donald Trump has cut most foreign aid, while Britain and other European countries are also spending less on aid and more on defence. UNHCR, without

naming donors, described the cuts as "brutal and ongoing" and said the situation was untenable, leaving refugees and others vulnerable.

David Miliband, president and CEO of the International Rescue Committee aid group, said the cuts to support for poorer countries would drive further displacement. The U.N. refugee agency, whose largest donor has historically been the U.S., has previously said the cuts put millions of lives at risk and left women refugees at a greater risk of rape and children at risk of trafficking. "We are already doing more with less – but we cannot do this indefinitely," said Jan Egeland, Secretary General of the Norwegian Refugee Council.

Israel's strike on Iran sparks LNG supply concerns in Asia: report

The Israeli strike on Iranian nuclear facilities has intensified concerns in Asia's LNG market, with trading companies, importers, and governments reviewing supply risks amid rising regional tensions, sources told Platts, part of S&P Global Commodity Insights, according to a recent report by S&P Global. The airstrike, described as "pre-emptive", came just as the summer season began in Asian countries, when gas consumption for power generation peaks.

Asia is highly exposed to LNG exports from the Middle East, accounting for nearly 88 percent of the region's shipments, said Eric Yep, principal analyst at Commodity Insights. "Importers are in discussions with their suppliers and portfolio players to explore contingency plans in case supply routes are impacted," Yep told S&P Global Commodity Insights.

While there have been no immediate supply disruptions, industry insiders warn that continued escalation could affect key transit points such as the Strait of Hormuz. The waterway, which handles nearly 11 billion cubic feet per day of LNG and around 20 million barrels of seaborne crude oil, is crucial to regional energy flows, the report said.



Asian spot LNG prices jumped following the Israeli assault. Platts assessed the July Japan-Korea Marker (JKM), the benchmark for LNG delivered to Northeast Asia, at $13.44 per MMBtu on June 13, up 5.38 percent from the previous day. Shipping firms are also taking precautionary measures. Japan's Mitsui OSK Lines has issued safety alerts for its vessels in the Persian Gulf, while chartering offers are being paused.

South Korea's energy ministry held an emergency meeting with LNG importers and said it was ready to act to minimise any disruptions.

China, which now sources a third of its LNG imports from Qatar, is particularly vulnerable due to its ongoing halt of US LNG imports.

ASEAN leaders advocate "boldly" merging the region's economies in face of US tariffs

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations must "act boldly" to accelerate regional economic integration as sweeping US tariffs leave much of the world caught in the middle of a devastating trade war, ASEAN Secretary-General Kao Kim Hourn said on 9 April according to the report of Philippine media "Inquirer."

"To remain relevant and resilient in a world where economic chaos is fast becoming the new normal, we must act boldly, decisively, and together to reaffirm Asean's commitment to a stable, predictable, and business-friendly environment," Kao Kim Hourn was speaking on the eve of a meeting of Asean economic and finance ministers as well as central bank governors in the Malaysian capital of Kuala Lumpur to discuss how to respond to the US tariffs.

"Without urgent and collective action to accelerate intra-Asean economic integration and diversify our markets and partnerships, we risk ceding our place in a fractured and fast-evolving global economy," Kao stressed.

Turmoil and trade wars dominate China's 'summer Davos'

Oil prices have hit their lowest in two weeks after Israel agreed to US President Donald Trump's proposal for a ceasefire with Iran. But business leaders at a key economic meeting in the northern Chinese port city of Tianjin find themselves troubled by the state of the global economy, and the prospect for meaningful growth.



The rapid escalation of the conflict between Iran and Israel - which has now pulled in the United States - temporarily replaced trade, tariffs and inflation at the top of a long list of concerns with far-reaching consequences.

"It is the most complex geopolitical and geo-economic backdrop we've seen in decades," Borge Brende, president and chief executive of the World Economic Forum (WEF), said ahead of the summit, dubbed the "Summer Davos". "If we are not able to revive growth again, we can unfortunately see a decade of lower growth."

WEF has long been a symbol of the merits of free trade and a globalised world - but Trump's tariff wars have upended supply chains and the ability of businesses to plan for the future. "We live in an environment of radical uncertainty," says Jeffry Frieden, professor of international and public affairs and political science at Columbia University.

Geopolitical risks have significant implications for the global economy. Higher oil prices can push up the operational costs of energy for goods producers - and at some point, those additional costs may be passed onto the consumer. People may in turn hold back on spending, as increased prices dampen demand. If inflation remains high, central banks will be reluctant to bring down interest rates.

Geopolitical tensions can also lead to losses as the result of other factors, such as the rerouting of flights and disruption to tourism activities. Investors can get rattled by uncertainty, leading to sell-offs on the market and a rush for safe haven assets like gold and the US dollar. Iran's threat to close the Strait of Hormuz – one of the world's most critical transit routes, through which roughly a quarter of the world's global oil supply passes – would leave China especially vulnerable. It is estimated that Beijing imports 90% of the oil Iran sells.

Chris Torrens, head of China at advisory and advocacy firm APCO, points out that some of the country's bigger machinery sectors, including the new high technology industries that Beijing is trying to support, still rely on oil. "So anything that disrupts that oil supply is going to be a worry to Beijing," he says.

The WEF event comes at a critical moment for China's economy, which has for years struggled from a protracted property crisis, high unemployment and sluggish domestic spending. Beijing has unveiled a string of measures to try to stimulate the economy. Until now, China is still achieving its official growth target of around 5%, and economists say the country could account for almost 30% of global growth this year.

Mr Torrens says Chinese officials detect an opportunity, and suggests that in a sense the country is opening its doors through the WEF event. "I think the US is giving China a massive PR opportunity to portray itself as a champion of globalisation," he says. "To say that China is a bastion of free trade is still a work in progress, because there are still market access issues. But China is certainly keen to play its part and step up as a regional and a global player."

With Trump's trade war now threatening exports from the manufacturing powerhouse, Beijing is looking to emerging technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI) as potential sources of growth. "Trade has been an important engine of growth for the last decade or two, but it's clear that certain technologies have a huge potential to help us with new sources of growth and competitiveness," said Mirek Dusek, managing director at WEF.

Accounting firm PwC says AI could boost global growth by 15% by 2035. At the WEF event, though, tariffs are never far from the minds of business leaders, as they try to make alliances and navigate an uncertain economic environment.

In the coming weeks, Trump's pauses on his hefty reciprocal levies are due to expire. And there's little certainty as to how the global business landscape might look after that.

"It's very difficult for businesses to make long term plans," Mr Frieden explains. "If you don't know what the level of tariffs on your goods are, you can 't figure out if it makes sense to relocate in the US or keep your activities overseas – whether you're an American corporation, or a non-American corporation."

Tariff War Could Cut US-China Goods Trade By 80 Percent: WTO Chief

The World Trade Organization chief said on 9 April the US-China tariff war could reduce trade in goods between the two economic giants by 80 percent, pulling down the rest



of the world economy. President Donald Trump raised tariffs on China to 125 percent as the world's two largest economies fought over retaliatory levies.

"The escalating trade tensions between the United States and China pose a significant risk of a sharp contraction in bilateral trade. Our preliminary projections suggest that merchandise trade between these two economies could decrease by as much as 80 percent," WTO director general Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala said in a statement.

She said the United States and China together accounted for three per cent of world trade and warned that the conflict could "severely damage the global economic outlook". Even as he slapped further tariffs on China, Trump paused higher tariffs on the rest of the world for 90 days after dozens of countries reached out for negotiations.

Okonjo-Iweala warned that the world economy risked breaking into two blocs, one centred around the United States and the other China. "Of particular concern is the potential fragmentation of global trade along geopolitical lines. A division of the global economy into two blocs could lead to a long-term reduction in global real GDP by nearly seven percent," she said.

She urged all WTO members "to address this challenge through cooperation and dialogue". "It is critical for the global community to work together to preserve the openness of the international trading system," said Okonjo-Iweala. "WTO members have agency to protect the open, rules-based trading system. The WTO serves as a vital platform for dialogue. Resolving these issues within a cooperative framework is essential."

Hours earlier, Trump ramped up duties on Chinese goods to 104 percent, only to hike them further when China retaliated by raising tariffs on US imports to 84 percent. In a social media post announcing the moves, Trump said China had been singled out for special treatment because of "the lack of respect that China has shown to the World's Markets".

US stock markets had slumped around 10 percent in the past week as trade tensions grew, but they surged after Trump announced his pause.

US Fed Chair warns tariffs will likely raise inflation, cool growth

US tariffs will likely cause inflation to rise and growth to slow, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said on 4 April, also warning of an "elevated" risk of higher unemployment. President Donald Trump's dramatic trade measures announced have tightened scrutiny of Powell and how the Fed will react to free-falling financial markets and concerns that a prolonged trade war would ramp up consumer prices and joblessness rates.

"It is now becoming clear that the tariff increases will be significantly larger than expected," Powell told an event in Virginia. "The same is likely to be true of the economic effects, which will include higher inflation and slower growth," he said, adding that it was "too soon" to consider changes to US monetary policy.



Powell spoke just minutes after Trump posted on social media, urging him to cut interest rates immediately and accusing him of playing politics in his role running the independent US central bank.

The larger-than-expected tariffs unveiled on 2 April stack on top of earlier country-specific levies, meaning that China, for example, will now face a new levy totaling 54 percent. Other top trading partners will also see higher rates, with the European Union now facing a 20 percent tariff from April 9, and India looking at a 26 percent levy.

The Trump administration has also targeted specific sectors of the economy, recently slapping a 25 percent tariff on automobiles not made in the United States. Powell said that he expected the current uncertainty to decline in the coming months. "Fast-forward a year from now, the uncertainty should be much lower," he noted. "The actual effects of the policies should then be pretty manifest and clear."

Powell's comments suggest the Fed is in no rush to cut its benchmark lending rate from its current elevated level of between 4.25 and 4.50 percent as it continues its struggle to bring inflation down to its long-term two percent target. In recent months, the Fed's progress in bringing inflation down to target has stalled, while growth has remained solid and the unemployment rate has hugged close to historic lows.

Trump's return to office has complicated the Fed's path to two percent, with tariffs likely to hit both sides of the bank's dual mandate, forcing them to choose between tackling inflation and keeping unemployment in check. Financial markets see a roughly two-thirds chance that policymakers will vote to keep rates unchanged again at the next Fed interest rate meeting in May, according to data from CME Group.

Ahead of Powell's speech on 4 April, Trump took to his Truth Social platform to insist that his tariff policy would not change despite the market reaction, and then called on Powell to act. "This would be a PERFECT time for Fed Chairman Jerome Powell to cut Interest Rates," he wrote. "He is always 'late,' but he could now change his image, and quickly."

"CUT INTEREST RATES, JEROME, AND STOP PLAYING POLITICS!" added Trump, who first nominated Powell to run the Fed, before turning against him during his first term. "I fully intend to serve all of my term," he said during the Virginia event.

WHO members adopt global pandemic accord, but US absence casts doubts

Members of the World Health Organization adopted an agreement on 20 May intended to improve preparedness for future pandemics following the disjointed global response to COVID-19, but the absence of the U.S. cast doubt on the treaty's effectiveness. After three years of negotiations, the legally binding pact was adopted by the World Health Assembly in Geneva. WHO member countries welcomed its passing with applause.



The pact was touted as a victory for members of the global health agency at a time when multilateral organisations like the WHO have been battered by sharp cuts in U.S. foreign funding.

"The agreement is a victory for public health, science and multilateral action. It will ensure we, collectively, can better protect the world from future pandemic threats," said WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

The pact aims to ensure that drugs, therapeutics and vaccines are globally accessible when the next pandemic hits. It requires participating manufacturers to allocate a target of 20% of their vaccines, medicines and tests to the WHO during a pandemic to ensure poorer countries have access.

However, U.S. negotiators left discussions about the accord after President Donald Trump began a 12-month process of withdrawing the U.S. - by far the WHO's largest financial backer - from the agency when he took office in January. Given this, the U.S., which poured billions of dollars into vaccine development during the COVID pandemic, would not be bound by the pact. And WHO member states would not face penalties if they failed to implement it.

U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. slammed the World Health Organization in a video address to the Assembly, saying it had failed to learn from the lessons of the pandemic with the new agreement. "It has doubled down with the pandemic agreement which will lock in all of the dysfunction of the WHO pandemic response... We're not going to participate in that," he said.

The deal was reached after Slovakia called for a vote on Monday, as its COVID-19 vaccine-sceptic prime minister demanded that his country challenge the adoption of the agreement. One hundred and twenty-four countries voted in favour, no countries voted against, while 11 countries, including Poland, Israel, Italy, Russia, Slovakia and Iran, abstained.

Some health experts welcomed the treaty as a step towards greater fairness in global health after poorer nations were left short of vaccines and diagnostics during the COVID-19 pandemic. "It contains critical provisions, especially in research and development, that — if implemented — could shift the global pandemic response toward

greater equity," Michelle Childs, Policy Advocacy Director at Drugs for Neglected Diseases initiative, told Reuters.

Others said the agreement did not meet initial ambitions and that, without strong implementation frameworks, it risked falling short in a future pandemic. "It is an empty shell... It's difficult to say that it's a treaty with firm obligation where there is a strong commitment... It's a good starting point. But it will have to be developed," said Gian Luca Burci, an academic adviser at the Global Health Centre at the Geneva Graduate Institute, an independent research and education organisation.

Helen Clark the co-Chair of The Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response, described the accord as a foundation to build from. "Many gaps remain in finance, equitable access to medical countermeasures and in understanding evolving risks," she added.

The pact will not go into effect until an annex on sharing of pathogenic information is agreed. Negotiations on this would start in July with the aim of delivering the annex to the World Health Assembly for adoption, WHO said. A Western diplomatic source suggested it may take up to two years to be agreed.

Global acute hunger hits new high, 2025 outlook 'bleak': UN-backed report

More than 295 million people faced acute hunger last year, a new high driven by conflict along with other crises -- and the outlook is "bleak" for 2025 as humanitarian aid falters, a UN-backed report said on 16 May. It was the sixth consecutive annual increase in the number of people hit with "high levels" of acute food insecurity, according to the Global Report on Food Crises.

A total of 295.3 million people endured acute hunger last year -- almost a quarter of the population in 53 of the 65 countries analysed for the report. This was up from 281.6 million people in 2023, according to the report, which is drafted by a consortium of international organisations and NGOs.

The number of people facing famine reached 1.9 million, more than double from the previous year, according to the report. A food security monitor warned that Gaza was at a "critical risk of famine" after more than two months of an Israeli aid blockade. "From Gaza and Sudan, to Yemen and Mali, catastrophic hunger driven by conflict and other factors is hitting record highs, pushing households to the edge of starvation," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in the report.

"The message is stark. Hunger and malnutrition are spreading faster than our ability to respond, yet globally, a third of all food produced is lost or wasted," he said. Conflict and violence were the primary drivers in 20 countries and territories, where 140 million people faced acute hunger, the report found.



Extreme weather was to blame in 18 countries and "economic shocks" in 15 nations, together affecting a total of 155 million people. The deteriorating situations in Gaza, Myanmar and Sudan outweighed improvements in Afghanistan and Kenya. The report warned that the outlook was "bleak" for 2025 as as major donor countries have substantially reduced humanitarian funding.

"This is more than a failure of systems -- it is a failure of humanity," Guterres said. "Hunger in the 21st century is indefensible. We cannot respond to empty stomachs with empty hands and turned backs," he said.

The "abrupt termination" of funding in 2025 has disrupted humanitarian operations in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Haiti, South Sudan, Sudan and Yemen, the report said.

Funding to humanitarian food sectors is projected to sink by up to 45 percent, it said.

US President Donald Trump's administration has dramatically cut foreign aid spending, but other countries have also reduced their contributions. The report added that "economic shocks" are likely to be a major driver of acute food insecurity as the global economy faces "high uncertainty" due to US tariffs and a weaker US dollar.

BRICS blast 'resurgence of protectionism' in Trump era

China, Brazil and other members of the BRICS grouping on 29 April slammed the "resurgence of trade protectionism" at a meeting in Rio de Janeiro dominated by US President Donald Trump's tariffs blitz.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov were among the top diplomats of the 11-country grouping attending two days of talks on issues ranging from Trump's trade war to the push for peace in Ukraine. Mauro Vieira, the foreign minister of Brazil which holds the rotating BRICS presidency, said the bloc underscored its "firm rejection" of protectionism, without explicitly referring to Trump.

Since returning to the White House in January, Trump has hit dozens of countries with a blanket 10 percent tariff, but China faces levies of up to 145 percent on many products. Beijing has responded with duties of 125 percent on US goods.

BRICS, which was founded by Brazil, Russia, India and China in 2009 and now also includes Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, South Africa and the United Arab Emirates, has become a major counterweight to Western-led groups such as the G7. It now makes up nearly half of the world's population, and 39 percent of global GDP.

The meeting in Rio came at a critical moment for the world economy after the International Monetary Fund slashed growth forecasts over the impact of Trump's sweeping levies on imports.

Brazilian exports to the United States are subject to 10 percent tariffs, a fraction of those imposed on China. And while Latin America's biggest economy has been hit by Trump's tariffs on steel imports -- Brazil is the second-biggest supplier of steel to the US -- President Luiz Inacio Lula's government has declined to retaliate and sought to negotiate with Washington instead.



Brazil has however made no secret of its frustration with European Union regulations on some of its agricultural exports, imposed over Amazon deforestation. Vieira hit out at the use of "non-tariff" trade barriers, deployed under "environmental pretexts." The group trod more carefully on the issue of non-dollar transactions among BRICS members.

At a summit last year in Russia, BRICS leaders discussed boosting such transactions, eliciting a swift rebuke from Trump who threatened them with 100 percent tariffs if they undercut the US currency. Brazil said the ministers had "underlined the importance of greater use of local currencies."

"Multilateralism" and "cooperation" were the watchwords of the meeting, which also discussed the wars in Ukraine and Gaza. The BRICS ministers called for a "complete withdrawal" of Israeli forces from Gaza, terming Israel's more than 50-day aid blockade of the territory "unacceptable." They had less to say about the war in Ukraine, which is at a critical juncture, with Washington threatening to end its efforts to broker peace in the absence of a breakthrough.

As in the past, Russia's BRICS partners stopped short of condemning Moscow's invasion of its neighbor, while calling for a "lasting peace deal." The growing global polarization is of particular concern to Brazil as it prepares to host the annual, often fractious UN climate conference in November in the Amazon.

BRICS-supported Bank to extend $1b credit to Bangladesh

The BRICS-established New Development Bank (NDB) has planned to raise its lending to Bangladesh development projects to US$ one billion this year. Vladimir Kazbekov, a Vice-President and Chief Operating Officer (COO) of NDB, said the bank has approved US$ 320 million for the implementation of the Expanded Dhaka City Water Supply Resilient project.

But, this year it wants to more than triple the funding amount in view of Bangladesh's development needs. Kazbekov made the comments when he called on Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus at the State Guest House Jamuna on 8 April. The Chief Adviser appreciated the role of the new

multilateral lender, saying it can make a significant contribution in upgrading its development infrastructure. Kazbekov said the lender was also committed to making major support for the infrastructure development of the gas sector in Bangladesh.



The NDB was also interested in lending substantially to the country's private sector in an effort to strengthen their capacity, Kazbekov said. The Bangladesh Chief Adviser stressed NDB lending in social infrastructure such as housing facilities for thousands of workers in the country's booming economic zones.

Kazbekov said the bank has introduced multi-currency lending, which will benefit Bangladesh. Shahriar Kader Siddiqi, Secretary to the Economic Relations Division, said the NDB should focus on introducing country strategy programmes on Bangladesh in an effort to align its funding with the development priorities of Bangladesh.

BIDA Executive Chairman Chowdhury Ashik Mahmud Bin Harun, SDG Coordinator Lamiya Morshed and ERD Secretary Shahriar Kader Siddiqi were present at the meeting.

Zurich researchers pioneer rare earth e-waste recycling

Researchers at ETH University in Zurich have developed a new method to efficiently recover rare earth elements from electronic waste, advancing sustainable recycling and reducing mining reliance.

Rare earth elements play a crucial role in modern electronics, powering fluorescent lamps, magnets in hard drives and are used in the production of generators for wind farms. Currently less than 1% of rare earth materials are recycled, due to the immense energy and chemical effort to separate elements in the materials, which comes at significant expense, according to ETH Zurich University.

ETH Pioneer Fellow, Dr. Marie Perrin and her supervisor Associate Professor at the Department of Chemistry and Applied Biosciences, Professor Dr. Victor Mougel developed a new method that allows the efficient separation of these elements, using a specially designed extractant to alter their solubility.



"We can separate these elements extremely well, and in particular, one of these elements, europium, that is found in fluorescent lamps," Mougel said. The discovery comes as the European Union is pushing towards greater recycling of rare earth metals, as rising environmental concerns and geopolitical pressures are driving it to seek greater resource independence.

Perrin told Reuters this innovation seeks to help the EU to meet its objects under the Critical Raw Material Act agreed in 2023 under which the bloc aims to mine 10%, process 40% and recycle 25% of its needs by 2030. The rare earth metals market is currently dominated by China, which controls up to 70% of global rare-earths mining, 85% of refining capacity, consultancy AlixPartners said.

The next goal is to bring the technology to scale by working with industrial partners, so that they can eventually have in-house recycling capacity, Perrin added.

Middle East tensions put investors on alert, weighing worst-case scenarios

Investors are mulling a host of different market scenarios should the US deepen its involvement in the Middle East conflict, with the potential for ripple effects if energy prices skyrocket. They have honed in on the evolving situation between Israel and Iran, which have exchanged missile strikes, and are closely monitoring whether the US decides to join Israel in its bombing campaign.

Potential scenarios could send inflation higher, dampening consumer confidence and lessening the chance of near-term interest rate cuts. This would likely cause an initial selloff in equities and possible safe-haven bid for the dollar. While US crude prices have climbed some 10 per cent over the past week, the S&P 500 has been little changed as of yet, following an initial drop when Israel launched its attacks.

However, if attacks were to take out Iranian oil supply, "that's when



the market is going to sit up and take notice," said Art Hogan, chief market strategist at B Riley Wealth.

"If you get disruption to supply of oil product on the global marketplace, that is not reflected in today's WTI price and that is where things get negative," Hogan said.

Analysts at Oxford Economics modeled three scenarios, ranging from a de-escalation in the conflict, a complete shutdown in Iranian production, and a closure of the Strait of Hormuz, "each with increasingly large impacts on global oil prices," the firm said in a note. In the most severe case, global oil prices jump to around $130 per barrel, driving US inflation near 6 per cent by the end of this year, Oxford said in the note.

"Although the price shock inevitably dampens consumer spending because of the hit to real incomes, the scale of the rise in inflation and concerns about the potential for second-round inflation effects likely ruin any chance of rate cuts in the US this year," Oxford said in the note.

Trump's plan could launch new era of weapons

US President Donald Trump's Golden Dome missile defence concept revives a controversial, decades-old initiative whose ambitious construction could upend norms in outer space and reshape relations between the world's top space powers.

The announcement of Golden Dome, a vast network of satellites and weapons in Earth's orbit set to cost $175 billion, could sharply escalate the militarization of space, a trend that has intensified over the last decade, space analysts say. While the world's biggest space powers - the US, Russia and China - have put military and intelligence assets in orbit since the 1960s, they have done so mostly in secrecy.

Under former President Joe Biden, US Space Force officials had grown vocal about a need for greater offensive space capabilities due to space-based threats from Russia and China. When Trump announced his Golden Dome plan in January, it was a clear shift in strategy, one that emphasizes a bold move into space with expensive, untested technology that could be a financial boon to US defense contractors.

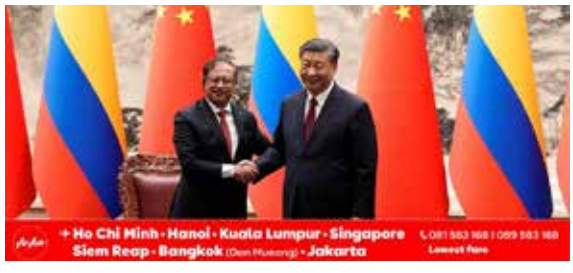


The concept includes space-based missiles that would launch from satellites in orbit to intercept conventional and nuclear missiles launched from Earth.

"I think it's opening a Pandora's box," said Victoria Samson, director of space security and stability at the Secure World Foundation think tank in Washington, referring to deploying missiles in space. "We haven't truly thought about the long-term consequences for doing so," she added.

China-Colombia sign Belt and Road cooperation pact

China and Colombia have signed a joint cooperation plan on the Belt



and Road Initiative, state media said on 14 May after their leaders met in Beijing. Burgeoning commerce in recent years has helped grow Beijing's influence in Latin America and the Caribbean, a region of strategic significance for the United States.

China is Colombia's second largest trading partner after the United States, which it recently displaced as Colombia's largest source of imports. China is ready to import more high-quality products from Colombia, back its firms in investing and doing business there and join in infrastructure construction, President Xi Jinping told counterpart Gustavo Petro, the Xinhua news agency said.

On 12 May Petro said Colombia would join the Belt and Road Initiative launched by Xi in 2013

to recreate the ancient Silk Road and build China's trade and infrastructure links with the world. More than 20 Latin American nations are among the more than 150 countries participating in the programme, but in February Panama said it was exiting from the pact, a move China blamed on pressure from the United States.

Petro, who took over in August 2022, made his first trip to China as president in October 2023, upgrading to a strategic partnership two-way ties first established in 1980.

Crisis-hit Maldives secures $8.8b Qatar investment

Cash-strapped Maldives has signed a deal with a Dubai-based company to establish an $8.8 billion investment zone aimed at diversifying the tourism hotspot into a "financial freezone". Three residential and office towers, a convention centre and hotels will form part of the Maldives International Financial Centre (MIFC), according to President Mohamed Muizzu's office.



"It will... position Male as the premier global business and financial hub in the Indian Ocean," the statement said, adding it would allow the Indian Ocean archipelago to "diversify beyond tourism". The $6.5 billion economy of the Maldives has been facing foreign exchange shortages since the Covid-19 pandemic and has been warned of a potential foreign debt crisis.

The announcement followed an agreement signed on 4 May with MBS Global Investments, a company owned by wealthy Qatari Sheikh Nayef bin Eid Al Thani. The MIFC zone will have no residency requirements and offer "no corporate tax, tax-free inheritance...and privacy" the statement added.

It is set for completion by 2030 with its projected revenue "to be well over $1 billion by the fifth year", according to the government. In February, the IMF said the Maldives required "urgent and stronger" fiscal consolidation to stabilise its troubled economy, despite a thriving tourism industry. The upmarket holiday destination expects its economy to grow by five percent in 2025, but the IMF warned that the sunny outlook masked significant risks.

The tiny nation declined an International Monetary Fund bailout loan late last year, with the government instead announcing severe spending cuts. Muizzu has taken a 50 percent pay cut, and introduced a mandatory 10 percent pay cut across most public sector jobs.

In September, the Maldives described its financial difficulties as "temporary" and said it had no plans to seek a bailout, despite warnings of a possible sovereign default. The Maldives is on the frontline of the battle against global warming, which could raise sea levels and swamp the nation of 1,192 tiny coral islands scattered across the equator.

China and India are the two largest bilateral lenders. Beijing has pledged further funding since Muizzu's 2023 election victory, with the president thanking China for its "selfless assistance" in providing development funds. Muizzu was welcomed in New Delhi in October by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who announced financial support to bolster the archipelago's struggling economy.

Official data showed the Maldives' foreign debt stood at $3.37 billion in the first quarter of 2024, equivalent to around 45 percent of GDP. China accounted for about 20 percent of the external debt, while India held just under 18 percent.

World's largest battery-powered ship launches from Australia

Hundreds gathered Friday at the Incat Tasmania shipyard in Hobart to watch the launch of the Incat Hull 096, which officials boasted represents a "giant leap forward in sustainable shipping" and is its "most important" project to date. "This is a historic day – not just for Incat, but for the future of maritime transport," said Incat Tasmania chairman Robert Clifford.

"We've been building world-leading vessels here in Tasmania for more than four decades, and Hull 096 is the most ambitious, most complex, and most important project we've ever delivered. This ship changes the game," he added. The Tasmania-based company built the ship for South American ferry operator Buquebus, which will run the vessel between the Argentinian capital, Buenos Aires, and Uruguay.



The cost of the vessel was not made public.

Eight electric-driven water jets propel the 426-foot-long Hull 096, which is also the world's largest electric vehicle. "Hull 096 proves that large-scale, low-emission transport solutions are not only possible, they are ready now," said Incat's chief executive, Stephen Casey. The ship is equipped with more than 551,156 pounds of batteries and an energy storage system with more than 40 megawatt-hours.

Work continues on the vessel's interior, which includes a 7,546 square foot duty-free retail deck – the biggest shopping space on any ferry in the world. Clifford said Incat plans to build "as many sustainable ships as possible for the global market, both here in Australia and overseas."

Trump inks $142B arms deal with Saudi Arabia, part of $600B investment package

President Trump signed off on the largest defense sales agreement in history, worth $142 billion, on his first full day in Saudi Arabia on 13 May — part of a series of bilateral deals worth $600 billion in investments. In remarks to business leaders, the president pitched Saudi Arabia as the key to building peace and prosperity in the Middle East, contrasting the kingdom with the nuclear intransigence of Iran.

"Exactly eight years ago this month, I stood in this very room and looked forward to a future in which the nations of this region would drive out the forces of terrorism and extremism, and take your place among the proudest, most prosperous, most successful nations of the world—as leaders of a modern and rising Middle East," Trump said after taking the stage to his signature theme tune, Lee Greenwood's "God Bless The USA"



Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, known widely as MBS, had promised Trump that the Kingdom would facilitate deals worth $600 billion if the president would make Saudi Arabia his first foreign stop in his second administration — and the two were openly chummy before signing the memorandums at the Royal Court in Riyadh, with Trump joking at one point that they should make the investments worth an even $1 trillion.

"Are we doing a good job so far for America? They're only putting in a trillion dollars," Trump told reporters while touring the investment forum exhibits before his speech.

Iran to sign $4bn oilfields deal with Russia in bid to bolster ties

Seven Iranian oilfields will be developed in cooperation with Russian firms, according to Iran's oil minister. Iran will sign a $4bn energy agreement with Russian companies, Iranian Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad has announced, as the two nations seek to bolster ties while trying to cope with punishing Western economic sanctions.



From military cooperation to energy, banking and agriculture, Tehran and Moscow have been engaged in deeper ties since the start of the military conflict in Ukraine, signing a strategic partnership treaty in January. 25 April deal is seen as another step in their bid to remove barriers in all spheres of their cooperation.

The deal also comes as Iran seeks to build momentum for nuclear negotiations with the United States, following consultations with its allies in Moscow and Beijing. On 24 April, Paknejad met with Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak, Putin's point man on relations with the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

The meeting took place as several members of OPEC+, the group comprising OPEC and its allies led by Russia, suggested that the group increase oil output in June for a second consecutive month. The proposed increase underscores a worsening dispute between members over compliance with production quotas.

It also follows calls from US President Donald Trump for OPEC to lower oil prices and his return to a policy of "maximum pressure" on Iran, whose oil exports Washington

wants to reduce to zero. On 25 April, the two countries also announced that Moscow may supply 1.8 billion cubic metres (bcm) of natural gas to Tehran this year at a price which has yet to be agreed.

Paknejad said the deal had not been finalised but the countries were working to clinch an agreement as soon as possible, with the Russian firm Gazprom implementing it. The two countries have long discussed setting up such a hub in Iran, with the possible participation of Qatar and Turkmenistan.

Russia has a long history of cooperation with Iran in the field of energy production and supply, and it helped Tehran build a nuclear reactor at Bushehr in the south of the country, Iran's first. In January, Russian President Vladimir Putin, at a meeting in the Kremlin with his Iranian counterpart Masoud Pezeshkian, said Russia may eventually supply up to 55 billion cubic metres (bcm) of natural gas per year to Iran, though starting from lower volumes of up to 2 bcm.

A figure of 55 bcm would be similar to the throughput of the Nord Stream 1 undersea pipelines to Europe that were damaged by blasts in 2022 following the war in Ukraine, and have not delivered any gas since then.

Russian gas giant Gazprom signed a memorandum last June with the National Iranian Gas Company to supply Russian pipeline gas to Iran. Possible routes for the pipeline have not been disclosed.

Heavy metals threaten 17% of global croplands, warns landmark study

A groundbreaking study published in *Science* has revealed that nearly 17% of the world's croplands are contaminated with heavy metals such as arsenic, cadmium, and lead — posing a hidden but serious threat to food safety and public health.

Heavy metals are toxic elements that originate from both natural sources, like geological formations, and human activities, including mining, industrial emissions, and the use of contaminated water and fertilisers. Unlike many pollutants, these metals do not degrade. Once in the soil, they persist for decades, silently entering the food chain through crops.



The study, led by Chinese researcher Deyi Hou and his team, is one of the most comprehensive mapping efforts of global soil contamination to date. Using machine learning and data from nearly 800,000 soil samples across 1,493 studies, the researchers assessed contamination from seven toxic metals: arsenic, cadmium, lead, chromium, copper, cobalt, and nickel.

While trace amounts of metals like zinc and copper are essential nutrients, others — including arsenic, lead, and cadmium — are toxic even at low concentrations. Long-term exposure to these metals is linked to cancer, kidney damage, osteoporosis, and developmental issues in children. Alarmingly, these metals do not alter the taste, smell, or appearance of food, making their presence undetectable to consumers.

Contamination patterns vary by region. In parts of central and southeast Asia, for example, rice fields are irrigated with arsenic-laced groundwater, leading to dangerous accumulation in crops. In South America's Amazon basin, mercury released through deforestation and informal gold mining contaminates nearby soils and waterways. Croplands near old mining sites remain affected for decades unless actively remediated.

However, there are signs of hope. Some soil minerals, like certain iron compounds, can reduce arsenic's toxicity by binding it in less harmful forms. Technological interventions and soil remediation strategies are emerging, and researchers emphasize that affected lands can be revitalized — and even repurposed under circular economy models.

The issue also raises serious concerns about environmental justice. Marginalized communities, often least responsible for pollution, are disproportionately exposed due to unsafe irrigation, proximity to industry, and limited access to soil testing or protective infrastructure.

Experts stress that there is no single solution. Governments and agricultural bodies must invest in better soil and water assessments, regulate industrial pollution, and provide farmers — especially smallholders — with the knowledge and tools to grow food safely.

"Soils carry memory," the study concludes. "But they also hold the potential to heal — if given the proper support." Food safety, it reminds us, starts not in the kitchen but in the ground beneath our feet. Addressing heavy metal contamination is not a matter of panic, but of responsibility — to farmers, consumers, and the environment.

WTO News

WTO marks 30 years : reflects on achievements & calls for reform

The World Trade Organization (WTO) celebrated its 30th anniversary with a high-level event that brought together senior government officials, private sector leaders, civil society representatives, and intergovernmental organizations. The gathering provided an opportunity to reflect on the organization's historic achievements and discuss the urgent reforms needed to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing global trade landscape.



WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala described the anniversary as a pivotal moment to evaluate the performance of "one of the world's most consequential organizations" and to lay the groundwork for reforming the multilateral trading system. "This is a time to look back at what the WTO has accomplished, but also to confront the serious challenges facing global trade and work together to strengthen the system for the future," she said.

The WTO was born from the Marrakesh Agreement, signed on 15 April 1994 by 123 countries. It officially came into existence on 1 January 1995. Over the past three decades, the WTO has facilitated a major expansion in global trade, helped raise living standards, created employment, and supported sustainable development.

Three Decades of Impact

Opening the event, General Council Chair Ambassador Saqer Almoqbel of Saudi Arabia praised the WTO for maintaining a rules-based global trading system and fostering cooperation among nations. "Let us not lose sight of the WTO's contribution, especially in today's context of uncertainty and economic strain," he said.

DG Okonjo-Iweala underscored the growing instability in global trade caused by geopolitical tensions and tariff-related developments. "This instability reminds many of the WTO's core value: providing predictability, dialogue, and cooperation in international trade," she noted. However, she acknowledged that valid concerns raised by members point to a need for deep institutional reform.

"The time has come for a far-reaching reform agenda — one that not only addresses what is broken but also positions the WTO to better serve its members in the years ahead," the DG added. She emphasized that reform should begin in Geneva and culminate in concrete decisions at the 14th WTO Ministerial Conference (MC14), to be held in Yaoundé, Cameroon, from 26–29 March 2026.

Okonjo-Iweala also highlighted the WTO's cost-effectiveness, noting that the organization's CHF 205 million annual budget underpins a global trading system worth over USD 30 trillion. "This is incalculable value for money. The WTO is more than tariffs — it is a system of trust and rules that underpins our economies."

Barroso: WTO in a "Quarter-Life Crisis"

The keynote address was delivered by José Manuel Durão Barroso, former Prime Minister of Portugal and former President of the European Commission. He commended the WTO for contributing to the lifting of 1.5 billion people out of extreme poverty since 1995 and called for renewed commitment to cooperation and dialogue.

Barroso likened the WTO to a 30-year-old navigating a "quarter-life crisis" — having achieved great things but now facing deep challenges. "The world is much more complex today than it was in 1995. Sidelining the WTO or allowing it to stagnate would be a costly error," he warned. He pointed out the dramatic shift in global economic power, with influence now more broadly distributed beyond the traditional triad of the United States, Europe, and Japan. In this context, he said, the WTO's relevance is not diminished but more essential than ever.

Past and Future: Voices from the Global Trade Community

The event featured two key sessions. The "Looking Back" panel brought together former Directors-General Supachai Panitchpakdi and Roberto Azevêdo, along with former General Council Chairs Ambassador Athaliah Lesiba Molokomme (Botswana) and Ambassador David Walker (New Zealand), who reflected on the WTO's contribution to economic

development and global poverty reduction.

The "Looking Forward" session featured leading voices from business, government, and civil society, including Cameroon's Trade Minister Luc Magloire Mbarga Atangana, former Canadian Minister Mary Ng, former Nestlé CEO Mark Schneider, ISO Secretary-General Sergio Mujica, and South Centre Executive Director Carlos Correa. The panel focused on key areas shaping the WTO's future — from sustainability and digital trade to equitable growth and inclusivity.

Friends of the System Call for Renewal

The event concluded with a joint statement from the "Friends of the System," a coalition of 39 WTO members reaffirming their support for a rules-based multilateral trading system. The statement celebrated the WTO's role in promoting transparent, predictable, and non-discriminatory trade and called for a recommitment to reforms that strengthen the organization's effectiveness and relevance.

The group urged members to address institutional challenges, improve inclusivity, and enhance capacity-building for developing countries to ensure that the benefits of trade are broadly shared.

State Councillor Anne Hiltpold closed the event with a message of support on behalf of the Republic and Canton of Geneva — the WTO's host city.

As the WTO embarks on the next phase of its journey, the anniversary celebration underscored a shared determination: to modernize the organization, maintain its central role in global trade governance, and ensure it continues delivering value for all its members.

Broad agreement on WTO reform "central priority" for MC14 : DG

There is a "broad agreement" among WTO members that repositioning and reform of the organization must be a central priority for the 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14) due to take place in March 2026, Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala said on 7 May. She spoke at a meeting of the WTO's Trade Negotiations Committee (TNC) in her capacity as Chair of the body.

"We are now in the midst of one of the largest disruptions in world trade in history," the Director-General told members. "But we are also now less than a year away from MC14, and we must think of what we need to do to maximize our chances for success there, including tackling some of the issues thrown up by this trade crisis."

Against this backdrop, DG Okonjo-Iweala said, she has spent the past few weeks engaging with members to discuss what might constitute a credible roadmap to MC14, which will begin on 26 March 2026 in Yaoundé, Cameroon.

The Director-General said members stressed the importance of MC14 sending a clear political message reaffirming the WTO's relevance and resilience amidst ongoing global uncertainty. There was also strong support for prioritizing WTO repositioning and reform at MC14, she noted.

In regard to substance, many members have proposed forward-looking corrective actions to inadequacies in the WTO's existing rulebook, together with reforms across core functions, including monitoring and transparency, negotiations, and dispute settlement, she said.



"The present disruption is seen as a vital opportunity to address the system's weaknesses and reposition the WTO for the future," the Director-General said. "We must not waste a crisis."

As part of this, workstreams could be established on issues such as dispute settlement reform, how to ensure the current WTO agreements remain dynamic and relevant, and looking at future trade rules so that the WTO remains responsive to evolving needs, the Director-General said.

She proposed a phased approach, consisting of a facilitator-led scoping exercise prior to MC14, ministerial guidance at MC14 on actionable steps for moving forward, and post-MC14 implementation within the workstreams, with the view to presenting concrete outcomes for endorsement at the 15th Ministerial Conference or earlier.

"We must seize this reform opportunity with seriousness and urgency," the Director-General declared. Members "need to consider not what the organization can do for us, but what we are willing to give up to reform the organization so it can survive and thrive."

The Director-General noted other priority areas identified for MC14, including agriculture, the "second wave" of fisheries subsidies negotiations, the e-commerce work programme and moratorium, the incorporation of the Investment Facilitation for Development Agreement and the joint initiative e-commerce agreement into the WTO framework, and development issues.

On all these issues, a stocktaking of the progress made will take place in July, and by December members "will need to make a clear decision on which negotiating issues are mature enough to be carried forward to MC14, and which are not," the Director-General said. "The overarching goal in all this is to enable productive and meaningful ministerial engagement in Yaoundé."

WTO members review six regional trade agreement & discuss transparency issues

At a meeting of the Committee on Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs) on 17 June, WTO members reviewed six regional trade agreements involving the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the European Union, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, the Pacific States (Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Samoa and the Solomon Islands), Cameroon, Morocco, Türkiye and Kosovo. They also reviewed other topics relevant to the Committee's work under the Transparency Mechanism for RTAs.



The Committee considered the following Agreements: ASEAN Framework Agreement on Services (AFAS); Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the European Union and New Zealand (Goods and Services); Interim Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) between the United Kingdom and the Pacific States (Goods); Economic Partnership Agreement between the United Kingdom and Cameroon (Goods); Agreement establishing an Association between the United Kingdom and Morocco (Goods); Free Trade Agreement between Türkiye and Kosovo (Goods).

The Chair of the Committee, Ambassador José Valencia of Ecuador, noted that 61 RTAs in force have still not been notified to the WTO up to 2 June 2025 — up from 58 RTAs on the previous list. The Chair outlined the informal consultations he recently held with members on the issues of non-notified RTAs, factual presentations, and possible inputs for the 14th WTO Ministerial Conference to be held in Yaoundé, Cameroon, on 26-29 March 2026.

Ambassador Valencia shared a report summarizing members' views, with background context provided primarily by the Secretariat, and his own suggestions for action. The report was presented under the Chair's own responsibility and without prejudice to members' views. Further informal consultations are planned after the summer to facilitate deeper discussions on the report's content and future actions.

Under other business, Brazil sought clarification on the trade deal recently announced by the United States and the United Kingdom. The US and the UK said they would relay the questions to capitals and revert back.

IFD Agreement to step up outreach and needs assessments for developing members

At a meeting on 10 June 2025, the 126 WTO members participating in the Investment Facilitation for Development (IFD) Agreement emphasized the importance of intensifying outreach efforts aimed at expanding membership and raising awareness of the Agreement and its wide-ranging development benefits — including through strengthened institutions and enhanced capacity-building support for developing and least-developed members.

Parties to the IFD Agreement highlighted progress in assisting developing and least-developed country members with needs assessments aimed at helping them prepare for implementation of the Agreement. Participants also reaffirmed their commitment to incorporating the IFD Agreement into the WTO framework as a most-favoured-nation-based plurilateral agreement open to all WTO members.

Co-Coordinators Ambassador Sofía Boza of Chile and Ambassador Sung-yo Choi of the Republic of Korea opened the session by

reporting on IFD parties' efforts at the May General Council meeting to incorporate the IFD Agreement into the WTO's legal framework. They emphasized that the meeting reaffirmed IFD parties' shared goals and encouraged members to build on this momentum as they prepare for the 14th WTO Ministerial Conference in Yaoundé (Cameroon) in March 2026.



Although no consensus could be reached at the General Council meeting due to the reservations of three members, many members expressed strong support for the incorporation of the Agreement, they noted. IFD participants also reiterated the Agreement's developmental value and its contribution to enhancing transparency, procedural efficiency, and predictability for investors.

Participants in the 10 June IFD meeting reiterated their strong commitment to incorporating the IFD Agreement into the WTO legal framework and pledged to step up efforts to further broaden the support among non-participating members, while continuing to promote the Agreement's benefits for developing economies. They also exchanged ideas on plans for several key upcoming events aimed at advancing this objective.

In parallel with the work on incorporating the Agreement into the WTO legal framework, participating members will continue advancing the IFD needs assessment process, the Co-Coordinators said. This process is designed to help developing and least-developed country (LDC) members identify their individual implementation gaps and technical-assistance and capacity-building needs, ensuring they are better equipped to fully implement and benefit from the Agreement. The needs assessments are a key element of the special and differential treatment (SDT) provisions under the IFD Agreement.

Members noted significant progress in the needs assessment process. Currently, over 20 assessments are underway with the assistance of partner international organizations, such as the International Trade Centre (ITC), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the World Bank, and UN Trade and Development. In addition to Ecuador, which completed its assessment last year, six members of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) are nearing completion of their assessments. Guatemala announced that it has finalized its assessment and will share its preliminary findings with other members, while Moldova indicated that it is currently evaluating the feasibility of conducting a needs assessment.

Since the February General Council meeting, the three IFD co-facilitators — Cambodia, Cameroon and the European Union — have been leading the IFD Agreement's outreach efforts. At the meeting, they provided updates on their recent engagement with non-participating members. Meetings held in Geneva and in various capitals have raised awareness and generated growing interest in the IFD Agreement. Some governments have expressed a clear interest in joining, while others are currently assessing the potential benefits and preparing to undertake needs assessments.

The Co-Coordinators also highlighted several high-profile international events where the IFD Agreement received recognition. They pointed to the positive momentum generated by the Jeju APEC Ministers' Declaration in May, which recognizes efforts towards the integration of the IFD Agreement into the WTO framework. The Co-Coordinators also referenced the Miami Investment Facilitation meetings, held in May, where the Eastern Caribbean States (OECS),the International Trade Centre (ITC) and the IDB co-hosted two key events focused on investment facilitation and sustainable FDI.

A high-level event titled "Strengthening Investment Facilitation in the Caribbean Region" featured experts from governments and the private sector, who emphasized the IFD Agreement's potential to transform the Caribbean region's investment landscape, the Co-Coordinators said. In addition, they noted the strong ministerial support for the IFD Agreement expressed at last week's OECD mini-ministerial meeting in Paris.

In addition, members welcomed the updated version of the IFD toolkit prepared by a small group led by the United Kingdom, which now features revised background information and updated content on the IFD Agreement. The updated toolkit will be published on the dedicated IFD portal of the WTO website following members' review.

Statement by the Director-General on escalating trade tensions

Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Director-General of the WTO, issued the following statement on 9 April:

"The escalating trade tensions between the United States and China pose a significant risk of a sharp contraction in bilateral trade. Our preliminary projections suggest that merchandise trade between these two economies could decrease by as much as 80%.

This tit-for-tat approach between the world's two largest economies — whose bilateral trade accounts for roughly 3% of global trade — carries wider implications that could severely damage the global economic outlook. Our assessments, informed by the latest developments, highlight the substantial risks associated with further escalation.

The negative macroeconomic effects will not be confined to the United States and China but will extend to other economies, especially the least developed nations. Of particular concern is the potential fragmentation of global trade along geopolitical lines. A division of the global economy into two blocs could lead to a long-term reduction in global real GDP by nearly 7%.



Moreover, trade diversion remains an immediate and pressing threat, one that requires a coordinated global response. We urge all WTO members to address this challenge through cooperation and dialogue.

It is critical for the global community to work together to preserve the openness of the international trading system. WTO members have agency to protect the open, rules-based trading system. The WTO serves as a vital platform for dialogue. Resolving these issues within a cooperative framework is essential."

Trade critical to ocean sustainability — DG Okonjo-Iweala at UN Ocean Conference

By aligning trade policies with ocean sustainability, we can better support sustainable development while protecting the oceans, Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala said



at the opening session of the United Nations Ocean Conference taking place from 9 to 13 June in Nice, France. Emphasizing the crucial role the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies will play in protecting fish stocks and supporting the livelihoods of coastal communities, she encouraged WTO members that have not yet ratified it to do so promptly so that the Agreement can enter into force as soon as possible.

DG Okonjo-Iweala highlighted that trade and the WTO can play a key role in harnessing the opportunities from the blue economy and in protecting the oceans' resources. Underscoring the blue economy's estimated annual value of over USD 2.6 trillion, she stressed: "The ocean is vital for our food, livelihoods and the health of our planet. More than 3 billion people either directly or indirectly rely on the oceans for their livelihoods." She also emphasized the importance of the oceans in helping many WTO members meet their development objectives, including coastal and small island developing states (SIDS).

Noting that marine and coastal ecosystems are threatened by climate change, biodiversity loss and marine pollution, including plastics pollution, she said that conserving and sustainably managing ocean resources is absolutely critical. "Business as usual is not an option" she said, stressing that a coherent approach that connects trade, finance and investment can help unlock inclusive, sustainable growth from the ocean economy.

DG Okonjo-Iweala said the WTO can support decarbonization efforts by reducing trade barriers and facilitating the cross-border diffusion of environmentally friendly goods, services and technology for maritime shipping and for harnessing renewable energy from the oceans. The WTO also provides a forum for members to share experiences on the trade impact of environmental measures, she noted.

Highlighting the important role the UN Ocean Conference (UNOC) plays in reinforcing international co-operation for the good of the world's oceans and

those who depend on its resources, DG Okonjo-Iweala stressed the importance of eliminating harmful fisheries subsidies to preserve ocean resources. WTO members have taken a first important step by adopting the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies in June 2022, she said, noting that only 10 more ratifications are needed for its entry into force - so far 101 members have already ratified.

DG Okonjo-Iweala was speaking at the opening high-level panel dedicated to conserving, sustainably managing and restoring marine and coastal ecosystems, including deep-sea ecosystems.

Goods barometer rises as imports surge in first quarter ahead of expected tariff hikes

Global goods trade posted a strong uptick in early 2025 driven by importers frontloading purchases ahead of anticipated higher tariffs; however, weakening export orders suggest that this momentum may not be sustained. The latest WTO Goods Trade Barometer rose to 103.5 — up from 102.8 in March, while the forward-looking new export orders index fell to 97.9, pointing to weaker trade growth later in the year.

The Goods Trade Barometer is a composite leading indicator for world trade, providing real-time information on the trajectory of merchandise trade relative to recent trends. Barometer values greater than 100 are associated with above-trend trade volumes, while barometer values less than 100 suggest that goods trade has either fallen below trend or will do so in the near future.

While the current barometer reading of 103.5 exceeds both the baseline value of 100 and the quarterly trade volume index, the decline in export orders and the temporary nature of frontloading suggest that trade growth may slow in the months ahead as enterprises import less and start to draw down accumulated inventories.



The most predictive barometer component, the new export orders index (97.9), has dipped below its baseline value of 100 into contraction territory, signalling weaker trade growth later in the year. On the other hand, most other barometer components have risen above trend. Transport-related indices, including air freight (104.3) and container shipping (107.1), reflect increased movement of goods. The automotive products index (105.3) also is above trend due to resilient vehicle production and sales. The electronic components index (102.0) has climbed above trend after underperforming in 2023 and 2024. Finally, the raw materials index (100.8) shows only modest growth, just above baseline.

World merchandise trade volume growth moderated in the fourth quarter of 2024 but it is likely to rebound in the first quarter of 2025 based on the goods barometer and preliminary trade data. The WTO Secretariat's Global Trade Outlook and Statistics report of 16 April 2025 projected stable trade growth of 2.7% for 2025 under a low-tariff scenario reflecting policy conditions at the start of the year, and a -0.2% contraction under actual policies in place as of mid-April. Subsequent developments, including US-China and US-UK trade agreements as well as higher tariffs on steel and aluminium, have nudged the forecast up and down slightly leaving the overall outlook basically flat at 0.1%. However, trade contraction is possible, for example if US reciprocal tariffs are reinstated, or if trade policy uncertainty spreads globally.

Members seek to broaden ITA participation and examine links with AI & e-commerce

Participants in the WTO's Information Technology Agreement (ITA) and the ITA Expansion Agreement endorsed on 7 May a programme of discussions aimed at broadening the agreements' membership and examining the ITA's role in advancing artificial intelligence (AI) and e-commerce. Members also welcomed initial steps to address classification challenges in tariff schedules for 22 IT products to ensure the effective implementation of the agreements.

Members agreed to organize three thematic sessions from the autumn of 2025 to the end of 2026. The first will be on "The Opportunities of ITA Participation: Participants' and Stakeholders' Experiences" with a view to expanding participation in the ITA and ITA Expansion Agreement. The second will focus on the ITA's role in promoting artificial intelligence and other new technologies. The third session will look into the ITA's role in supporting e-commerce and addressing the digital divide. The Chair of the ITA Committee, Mr. Ta-Lin (Peter) Shih (Chinese Taipei), said the WTO Secretariat and interested members will work together to follow up on the details of these sessions and keep the Committee informed of further developments.

The Chair also updated members on his consultations on furthering discussions on non-tariff measures (NTMs) imposed by governments



to regulate trade, which members further discussed at the meeting.

Suggestions included focusing on NTMs imposed on the most traded ITA products, such as mobile phones and computers, and tackling NTMs related to the remanufacturing of electronic products, which refers to disassembling and repairing used devices. Members also suggested organizing joint sessions with the Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT), undertaking a survey to identify NTMs participants would like to discuss, and revitalizing the NTMs working group. The Chair encouraged members to elaborate on their suggestions at the next meeting, adding that the next chair could consult on creating a new NTM work programme. The Chairperson of the Goods Council is consulting with members regarding chairpersons for subsidiary bodies, including the ITA Committee.

In response to members' requests, the Secretariat provided a working document containing guidance on how to update the classification of 22 IT products so that they align with the 2022 version of the Harmonized System (HS) — the system used for classifying traded goods and determining the tariffs applied to them. Members have not so far agreed on common HS codes for these 22 products, which include flat panel displays and network equipment. The Secretariat noted that the document is prepared on its own responsibility based on its best judgement on how the classifications should evolve, adding that it has asked the World Customs Organization for feedback on the document.

The European Union; Japan; Hong Kong, China; and the United Kingdom thanked the Secretariat for this new initiative and the way forward proposed, indicating that they would study the working document, with several noting that it represents a good start to resolving classification divergences among members and ensuring the healthy functioning of the ITA.

ITA implementation issues raised at the meeting included concerns about Indonesia's and Egypt's import duties on IT products and mobile phones considered by participants to be covered by the ITA. These concerns have also been raised at previous meetings.

Call for applications launched for support to women exporters through WTO-ITC WEIDE Fund

The WTO-ITC Women Exporters in the Digital Economy (WEIDE) Fund launched on 22 April its first call for applications for funding and technical support. Women-led businesses in the Dominican Republic, Mongolia and Nigeria are invited to apply for support aimed at boosting their digital and export capabilities. An application period for Jordan will follow shortly.

A joint initiative of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the International Trade Centre (ITC), the WEIDE Fund is supported by a USD 50 million commitment to empower women entrepreneurs and help them thrive in global markets through the use of digital tools and platforms.

WTO Director-General Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala emphasized the importance of inclusive access to digital trade opportunities: "Digital trade is reshaping the global economy. Women — including those in developing countries — must be at the forefront. The WTO-ITC WEIDE Fund is about powering growth, innovation and job creation. It reflects the WTO's broader commitment to sustainable and inclusive re-globalization, where no one is left behind."



The WEIDE Fund offers two types of grants: Discovery Grant (up to USD 5,000): For early-stage businesses exploring digital trade opportunities; Booster Grant (up to USD 30,000): For businesses ready to scale up their digital presence and expand into global markets. Beyond financial support, the WEIDE Fund provides technical assistance, mentorship and access to international business networks. The initiative aims to build the long-term competitiveness and resilience of women-led micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) involved in e-commerce, online services, or other forms of digital trade as well as those ready to engage in these activities.



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*২০২৪ সালে বাংলাদেশ ব্র্যান্ড ফোরাম, এন সার্চ ও দ্য ডেইলি স্টার-এর যৌথ উদ্যোগে স্বীকৃত

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