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US expects China to delay rare earth export controls as trade deal nears

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FT SYNDICATION SERVICE

TOKYO/ BEIJING/ KUALA LUMPUR: US officials expect China to delay introducing export controls on rare earths, after two days of talks in Malaysia raised hopes that Donald Trump and Xi Jinping would agree to extend a trade truce at their high-stakes summit this week.

High-level talks yield progress ahead of summit between Trump and Xi

Beijing's announcement of the sweeping controls this month triggered a sharp escalation in trade tensions between the world's two biggest economies and threatened to torpedo plans for Trump and Xi's first summit since 2019.

Following a weekend of negotiations in Kuala Lumpur, a senior US official told the Financial Times that Beijing's probable delay was prompted by Washington's threat of additional tariffs as well as pressure from other countries that rely on the minerals.

US Treasury secretary Scott Bessent told ABC News that he expected China would delay the controls on minerals used in

fighter jets, smartphones and electric vehicles for a year while Beijing re-examined them. They are due to come into force in coming weeks.

Li Chenggang, the top trade negotiator in China's delegation, did not comment on a possible delay but told reporters that Beijing and Washington had reached a "preliminary consensus" on export controls, fentanyl and extending a trade truce that is set to expire on November 10.

The truce, which the two sides last extended in August, paused the 145 per cent tariffs that Trump imposed on China when he started his trade war in April. Xi retaliated by slapping 125 per cent levies on US exports.

The US official told the Financial Times that they expected the truce would be extended by more than the previous 90-day period.

"We think it would give great stability and great certainty to the global economy and to the US-China relationship," they said.

In a separate interview on CBS, Bessent said that Trump's threat this month to raise US tariffs on Chinese imports by an extra 100 per cent was "effectively off the table".

"I can tell you we had a very good two days," the Treasury secretary said.

The prospect of the US and China extending their truce came after Trump arrived in Malaysia on Sunday as part of a week-long trip to Asia - and his first to the region since returning to the White House. The US president flies to Japan on Monday to meet Sanae Takaichi, the new prime minister, before heading to South Korea for his meeting with Xi on Thursday.

In a blitz of deals on Sunday, Trump struck

trade and mineral agreements with Malaysia and Cambodia, as well as agreeing frameworks with Thailand and Vietnam. He also presided over the signing of a peace treaty between Cambodia and Thailand following their violent border dispute this summer.

On Sunday, Bessent, who led the US delegation, said the sides had agreed on a "very positive" framework for Trump and Xi to approve when they meet at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum in South Korea.

China's state-run news agency Xinhua said Washington and Beijing had reached a "basic consensus" on a framework to "address their respective concerns". It said the negotiations in Malaysia - the fifth round between the parties this year - had covered export controls, levies against Chinese shipping, fentanyl and agricultural trade.

Beijing's plan to tighten its grip on rare earths triggered alarm in Europe, with European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen warning last week that the risk of a crisis in their supply was "no longer a distant risk". A second US official told the FT that "it was the president's very clear message...that the rare earths regime was unacceptable and would result in massive countermeasures", adding that it "was really important that other countries...stood up".

"When you have the EU say we're drawing up countermeasures against China...that is not something they usually do," the person said. The weekend of talks had also yielded a commitment from China to buy American soybeans, the first US official told the FT, adding that Beijing had agreed to "stop using soybeans as pawns in the global trade game"

EXPERIMENTATION WITH NEW CUSTOMS VALUATION SYSTEM

Worry overshadows Asycuda replacement move

System slowdown following budget prompts govt action for UN-designated platform windup

DOULOT AKTER MALA

A government move to phase out from the tested customs digital platform Asycuda to adopt an advanced system has raised more concerns than corroboration from stakeholders in foreign trade and national revenue.

Customs authority, economists and businesses foresee a possible setback in import-export activities if such experiments done on a "proven successful system".

Customs officials find the move "suicidal" for the government as the country is still highly dependent on revenue at import stage.

Asycuda or Automated System of Customs Data is a system developed by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in 1993 for Bangladesh's customs-data hub that has interconnectivity with Bangladesh Bank, the Export Promotion Bureau and other major public and private entities along the domestic information superhighway.

National Board of Revenue officials have said Chief Adviser's Special Assistant Faiz Ahmad Taiyeb, also in charge of the Ministry of Posts, Telecommunications and Information Technology, instructed the NBR to consider phasing out from the system reducing dependence on vendors or software.

TIMELINE

- 1993 ASYCUDA introduced in Bangladesh (UNCTAD-developed)
- 2021 Upgraded to ASYCUDA World
- 2 weeks of slowdown in July 2025 triggered review



100+ countries currently using ASYCUDA

75%+ of Bangladesh's revenue collected at import stage

POTENTIAL RISKS

- Import-export delays
- Data security vulnerabilities
- Revenue collection disruption
- Compatibility loss with Bangladesh Single Window

RECOMMENDATION

- Upgrade existing one
- Strengthen licensing and cyber protection
- Avoid abrupt system replacement

The direction from the reformative interim government came following a slowdown in the system for two weeks in July 2025 after the passage of the national budget for fiscal year 2025-26. According to customs officials, the system has been slowed down to change the tax-duty rates attuned to the Finance Ordinance 2025 that stipulates the budgetary measures. Already, two meetings have been held--one chaired by Mr Taiyeb and another by

NBR's customs member Kazi Mustafizur Rahman (recently retired), discussing whether the government can adopt a new digital platform instead of Asycuda.

Talking to The Financial Express Monday, Mr Mustafiz acknowledged the move from the CA office.

"I strongly opposed the instruction seeing it a disaster."

He raised red flag at the meeting explaining possible complexities involving such experimentations involving revenue mobilisation for the state exchequer.

Asycuda world is a proven successful system that is working smoothly over the years, he said, acknowledging some disruptions earlier which, however, have been resolved through system upgrading.

"Such major digital platform must be developed through licensing software to check cyber-attacks and hacking into export-import data," Mr Rahman said.

Asycuda system is an advanced one which was upgraded to Asycuda ++ and later in Asycuda world in 2021.

Exporters have long demanded making the

system faster to cope with the rising volumes of export trade.

Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) President Mahmud Hassan Khan Babu, however, finds no need to transition from Asycuda system.

"The system could be made faster, instead of replacing with new one," he added.

Trade economist Dr Masrur Reaz, founder-chairman of Policy Exchange Bangladesh, says the Asycuda system is highly standardized-domain-based digital platform which is widely used by more than a hundred countries.

"Any experimentation may leave serious adverse impact on international trade and revenue mobilisation with this," he alerts.

The government recently launched Bangladesh Single Window based on Asycuda system, so it should let the window run smoothly rather than experimenting on Asycuda, he notes.

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28 OCT 2025

BD's future growth hinges on export diversification, says expert

FE REPORT

Bangladesh's next phase of development will depend on how quickly the country can navigate the evolving global trade landscape. Failure to diversify and technology-enable its export sector could push the country into the middle-income trap.

Dr Masrur Reaz, Chairman and CEO of Policy Exchange Bangladesh, made the remark in his keynote presentation on 'Leveraging the Power of Global Markets: Why Export Competitiveness and Diversification Matter for Bangladesh' at the second session of the Economic Reform Summit 2025 held at a city hotel on Monday.

The conference was jointly organised by Voice for Reform, BRAIN, Innovision Consulting, Fintech Society, and Nagorik Coalition.

Dr Reaz noted that although Bangladesh's exports have grown nearly tenfold over the past four decades, they have become excessively dependent on the ready-made garment (RMG) sector. The sector now accounts for more than 81 per cent of total exports, while other sectors such as leather goods and home textiles together contribute only around 5 per cent.

"Such a narrow export structure exposes our economy to serious risks -- especially when preferential market facilities will diminish after our graduation from LDC status," he warned.

In his presentation, Dr Reaz highlighted that after LDC graduation, Bangladesh's apparel exports could face tariffs of around 11.6 per cent in the European Union, 16.2 per cent in Canada, and over 22



Managing Director of Apex Footwear Limited Syed Nasim Manzur speaks at Economic Reform Summit at a city hotel on Monday. — FE Photo

per cent in India. As a result, overall exports could decline by as much as 14 per cent.

According to Policy Exchange data, Bangladesh's participation in global manufacturing value chains is only 22-26 per cent, whereas Vietnam's participation exceeds 60 per cent. The country lags significantly in technology adoption and automation, leading to higher production costs and limited value addition.

He added, "Globally, new rules are being implemented on environmental protection, human rights, and sustainable production. If we fail to align with these standards, our export markets may shrink."

Dr Reaz identified six promising sectors for the future economy -- agriculture, information technology, pharmaceuticals, leather goods, light

engineering, and plastics-semiconductors -- as potential new engines of export diversification. With the right policies, infrastructure, and skilled workforce, these sectors could generate an additional USD 35 billion in export earnings by 2030, he noted.

Calling reform the need of the hour, Dr Reaz said, "Reducing logistics costs by 25 per cent could increase exports by up to 20 per cent."

He urged immediate prioritisation of infrastructure development, formation of regional economic corridors, FTA negotiations, skills development, and automation in trade processes.

Addressing the session as a discussant, Syed Nasim Manzur, Managing Director of Apex Footwear Limited, said the government should

set clear targets focusing on two to three priority sectors instead of spreading attention across too many. He also raised concerns about unnecessary business costs, noting that taxes should be imposed on profits rather than turnover, as turnover tax adds an additional burden on businesses.

Mr Manzur further emphasised the need to improve the country's logistics facilities to facilitate business operations and reduce overall costs.

Shams Mahmud, Managing Director of Shasha Denims, said the government should formulate policies proactively, considering the changing global economy and the challenges of LDC graduation.



The textile sector has significant untapped potential, he said, adding that government policies should encourage enterprises to adopt new technologies for man-made fibres (MMF), supported by long-term financing and energy security.

He also emphasised that the textile education curriculum should be designed to meet future industry demands.

He further said that taxation should be based on actual income rather than turnover.

Rasha Khan, Founder of Escape Bags and Managing Partner at RMS, said that as a startup company, they are facing numerous challenges, including high duties on imported raw materials, the high cost of maintaining compliance, and the expense of obtaining various certifications.

She further explained that they have to import nearly 80 per cent of their raw materials without a bond licence. "If the government provides policy support for start-ups, it would help us grow and diversify exports," she added.

Among others, Sadaf Saaz, CEO of EskeGen Ltd, and Mir Shahrukh Islam, CEO of Bondstein, also spoke at the event.

BD's cashless economy faces key hurdles

At the opening session of the summit, experts highlighted key barriers to achieving a fully cashless economy.

Despite rapid progress in digital financial service, Bangladesh's transition to a fully cashless economy faces significant challenges, including low financial literacy, and limited interoperability between providers, and high transaction costs, said Md. Arfan Ali, Chairman of Zaytoon Business Solutions, and ex-Managing Director of Bank Asia, in his keynote presentation.

These barriers, combined with weak digital infrastructure and public mistrust in online financial systems, are slowing the country's progress toward widespread financial inclusion, he said.

The session, titled 'Cashless Economy & Financial Inclusion', was held on Monday.

In his keynote paper, Mr. Arfan Ali highlighted the significant gap between Bangladesh's financial inclusion efforts and global standards, calling the country's progress 'alarmingly behind'.

"The widespread adoption of bank accounts is the critical first step we must address to begin closing this gap," he said.

He noted that limited digital and financial skills cause distrust in digital payments.

"Low digital and financial skills among large population segments reduce trust and correct use of digital payments, causing errors, fraud susceptibility, and preference for cash," he said.

Uneven internet and smartphone coverage in rural areas creates unreliable access and poor user experience for payments, raising failure rates and abandoned transactions, he pointed out.

Arfan Ali noted that fragmented platforms and the lack of seamless interoperability between digital platforms forces users to switch between services, incurring additional costs and efforts in the process.

Underscoring the need for a cashless economy, he said a cashless economy isn't just a modern convenience; it's now a fiscal imperative.

"We have to spend an enormous cost of Tk 200 billion for printing, minting, and handling physical cash every year," he said.

Shahadat Khan, Founder and CEO of TallyPay, discussed the goal of cashless transactions and the Bangladesh Bank's initiatives like QR code payments for in-store transactions and P2P (Person-to-Person) transfers.

Mohammad Rashed, Additional Director of Bangladesh Bank's Payment Systems Department, provided insights into the central bank's role in driving the transformation.

He said that the year 2026 is anticipated to be a period of robust transformation for the digital payment sector.

"This progress is expected as several key innovations are currently in the pipeline, and the effects of which will become visible in the coming year," he said.

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Exporters can soon swap retained forex for taka credit to meet urgent cash needs

BANKING - BANGLADESH

SHAIKH ABDULLAH

The central bank is set to introduce a currency swap facility allowing exporters to temporarily exchange foreign currency from their Exporters' Retention Quota (ERQ) accounts for local currency to meet urgent cash needs.

Under the proposed system, exporters will be able to obtain taka against their ERQ-held foreign currency for a fixed term and later receive the same amount of foreign currency back after returning the taka.

A senior Bangladesh Bank official told The Business Standard that the move aims to ease liquidity pressure for exporters and stabilise foreign exchange supply in the banking system. A circular outlining the terms is expected soon.

He said many exporters keep foreign currency in their ERQ accounts for future import payments or in anticipation of dollar appreciation but often face cash shortages. "The swap arrangement will help them access funds easily while encouraging banks to finance exporters," he added.

Explaining the process, the official said, "If an exporter swaps one dollar with a bank for a month, the bank will pay them the equivalent in taka at the day's rate. After one month, the dollar will be returned to the exporter's account, and they will repay the taka."

Separate interest rates will apply for both currencies, with banks earning interest on taka and exporters on dollars.

The rates and swap durations have not yet been finalised, but the Bangladesh Bank will soon issue a detailed circular specifying them.

Business leaders and analysts have welcomed the initiative, saying it could ease exporters' cash constraints and reduce pressure on the volatile dollar market.

"The dollar market has been unstable for a long time, with the exchange rate rising steadily,"

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TAKA ACCESS VIA ERQ DOLLARS

How it will work

Exporter swaps USD/other currencies from ERQ account with bank



Bank pays taka at the day's exchange rate

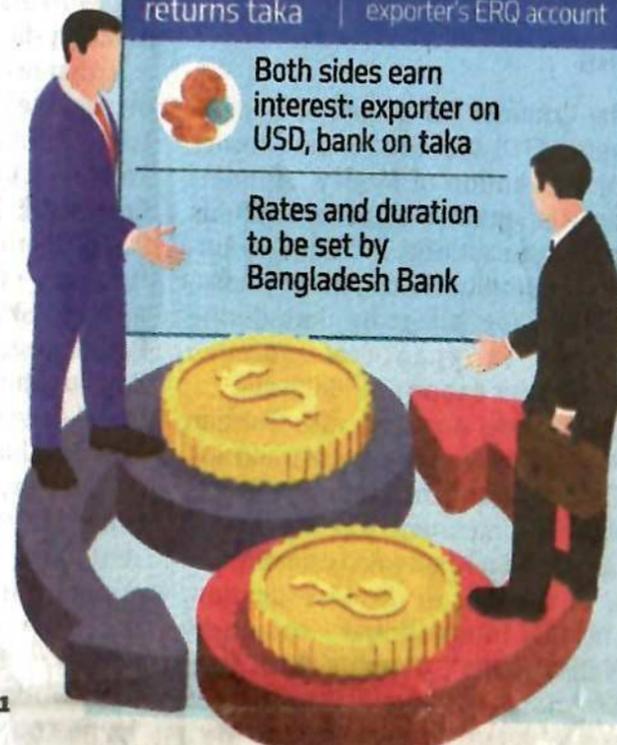
After a fixed term, exporter returns taka

Bank returns same USD amount to exporter's ERQ account



Both sides earn interest: exporter on USD, bank on taka

Rates and duration to be set by Bangladesh Bank



WHY THE MOVE



Helps exporters meet urgent cash needs without selling dollars

- Supports liquidity in banking system

- May reduce pressure on volatile dollar market

- Encourages banks to finance exporters more easily

CURRENT ERQ SNAPSHOT



\$500M in USD

\$100M in other currencies

Retention limits

- ▶ ICT 35%
- ▶ Knitwear, jute, agri: 30%
- ▶ Woven apparel 7.5%



Positive step, but must ensure rates stay below market levels to attract strong exporters.

MAHMUD HASAN KHAN, BGMEA President

TBS Insights by IPDC FINANCE



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said an analyst. "Given the IMF's conditions for exchange rate flexibility and potential import pressure after the national election, this move seems timely."

Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) President Mohammad Hatem also described the move as timely, saying it would help exporters meet immediate cash demands amid difficulties in securing short-term bank loans.

What is an ERQ account

According to the central bank, the ERQ account is a special foreign currency account where exporters can retain a portion of their export earnings. The retention rate varies by sector: up to 35% for ICT exporters, 30% for knit-

wear, agriculture, and jute exporters, and 7.5% for woven apparel.

These accounts can hold currencies such as the US dollar, pound sterling, euro, or yen. Given that most Bangladeshi exports are settled in dollars, the bulk of ERQ deposits are dollar-denominated.

Currently, exporters hold about \$500 million in their ERQ accounts, alongside another \$100 million in other foreign currencies.

Officials said the need for this measure has grown since the Bangladesh Bank discontinued its Tk5,000 crore pre-shipment refinance scheme in March this year. The fund, introduced during the pandemic, had provided exporters with crucial liquidity support.

'Success depends on interest rates'

Syed Mahbubur Rahman, managing director of Mutual Trust Bank, told TBS that exporters currently have to relinquish full ownership of their foreign currency to access taka. "Under the swap system, they can get funds without giving up that ownership. It's a new financing avenue for exporters," he said.

However, he noted that the scheme's success will depend on interest rates and operational simplicity. "The dollar rate is relatively stable now, so if the interest rate is too high, exporters may not be interested."

BKMEA's Mohammad Hatem said the interest rate must be rational. "The rate gap between dollar and taka should not exceed 2%, and repayment should be flexible, possibly through monthly instalments."

Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) President Mahmud Hasan Khan said the interest rate remains below prevailing market rates as funds in ERQ accounts typically belong to financially strong exporters, who are unlikely to engage in dollar swaps at higher rates.

A BGMEA director said, "The ERQ dollar swap system could be very effective for exporters facing cash flow stress, but the process must be simple and affordable to ensure participation."

A senior executive at a state-owned bank, speaking on condition of anonymity, said determining swap tenures and rates could be complex. "It may pose new challenges for banks in managing their assets and liabilities," he said.



Bangladesh seeks tariff waiver on jute exports to Pakistan as trade talks revive after two decades

TRADE - BANGLADESH

TBS REPORT

Both sides agree to hold regular meetings

Bangladesh has urged Pakistan to remove existing import tariffs on jute and jute goods in a bid to narrow the trade imbalance and revive exports of the traditional fibre, which have fallen sharply in recent years.

The proposal was made at the ninth session of the Bangladesh-Pakistan Joint Economic Commission (JEC), held yesterday in Dhaka – the first such meeting in nearly two decades.

The Bangladesh delegation was led by Finance Adviser Salehuddin Ahmed, while Pakistan's team was headed by Federal Minister for Petroleum Ali Pervaiz Malik.

Bangladesh officials told the meeting that jute and jute goods account for about 38% of the country's total exports to Pakistan, but shipments have declined significantly. Export earnings from the sector dropped from \$63 million in FY22 to \$23 million in FY24.

Both sides agreed that bilateral trade remains below potential, currently valued at under \$1 billion, and stressed the need for greater collaboration to unlock new opportunities.

Pervaiz Malik said Pakistan regularly imports raw jute from Bangladesh and is keen to increase procurement of jute and diversified jute products.

Bangladesh, Pakistan hold 9th JEC after 20 years

- Agreed to boost trade, investment, connectivity
- Direct air, sea links under discussion
- Signed MoU on Halal trade cooperation
- Talks covered energy, education, climate issues
- Plan to explore new trade deal beyond SAFTA

He added that discussions also covered surplus agricultural produce, pharmaceuticals, and energy cooperation.

"The achievements of this bilateral session will grow significantly in the coming years," he said, adding that the next JEC meeting will set specific targets to expand trade between the two nations.

After the meeting, Salehuddin told reporters, "We discussed several issues of mutual interest such as agriculture, trade, IT, and food security. I believe our agreements will benefit both nations."

He added that Bangladesh placed strong emphasis on regional cooperation, saying, "We want to build an environment of collaboration not only between our two countries but across South Asia. Strengthening the Saarc process, which has become weak in recent years, is crucial."

The two sides agreed to hold regular meetings, with the tenth JEC session scheduled to take place in Islamabad. The 8th meeting was held in Dhaka in September 2005.

During FY24, Pakistan exported goods worth \$661 million to Bangladesh, while Bangladesh's exports to Pa-

kistan stood at just \$57 million, reflecting a substantial trade deficit for Dhaka.

MoU on halal product trade

An MoU on Halal trade cooperation was signed between the Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI) and the Pakistan Halal Authority (PHA), aimed at facilitating certification and trade in halal products.

Under the arrangement, BSTI-approved halal products will be eligible for export to Pakistan without re-testing, while PHA-certified products may enter Bangladesh on the same basis.

ERD officials said both sides agreed to strengthen business-to-business engagement and diversify the trade basket. They also discussed exploring a concessionary trade agreement offering deeper tariff cuts than those under SAFTA.

Pakistan requested faster access to Bangladesh's mango market, while both sides agreed to encourage joint-venture investments in sectors such as textiles, jute, leather, pharmaceuticals, light engineering, and renewable energy.

Pakistan also expressed appreciation for exporting 52,000 tonnes of white rice to Bangladesh earlier this

year under a G2G arrangement and agreed to finalise another MoU between the Trade Corporations of Pakistan and Bangladesh for agricultural commodities.

Both countries will also explore institutional linkages between the two countries' revenue boards to improve revenue generation and the tax-to-GDP ratio.

Connectivity and education

Both countries agreed to resume direct air connectivity and explore the establishment of direct shipping links between Chittagong and Karachi ports. Pakistan also offered the use of Karachi Port for Bangladesh's trade with China and other regional partners.

The two sides will set up a joint working group on Maritime Cooperation and another on Information Technology and Telecommunications.

Pakistan announced the expansion of scholarships for Bangladeshi students, increasing the number from five to twenty-five, alongside plans to establish a Bangladesh-Pakistan Knowledge Corridor with 500 new scholarships.

They also agreed to strengthen cooperation between the central

banks in SME financing, microcredit, and financial inclusion, and to enhance tourism and cultural exchange through easier visa procedures.

Expanding cooperation in key sectors

The two nations agreed to explore investment and partnership opportunities in automotive manufacturing (including EVs), industrial machinery, power equipment, sports goods, ICT, and renewable energy.

They also agreed to share experience in export processing zone management and encourage Pakistani investors to explore opportunities in jute diversified products.

Recognising the strong textile ties – as several Bangladeshi companies import 50%-70% of their fabrics from Pakistan – both sides agreed to promote joint-venture investments in the textile sector.

In agriculture, the parties decided to form a Joint Working Group to strengthen cooperation in tea, genetic engineering, and pest management, and to renew a 2006 MoU between the Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC) and the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council.



অতিরিক্ত নিয়ন্ত্রণে রপ্তানি বাধাগ্রস্ত

ইকোনমিক রিফর্ম সামিট

রাজধানীর গুলশানের একটি হোটেলে 'ইকোনমিক রিফর্ম সামিট' শীর্ষক সম্মেলনে অংশ নিয়ে ব্যবসায়ীরা এ কথা বলেন।

নিজস্ব প্রতিবেদক, ঢাকা

দেশে ব্যবসা-বাণিজ্যের ক্ষেত্রে অতিরিক্ত নিয়ন্ত্রণের পরিবেশ রয়েছে। অর্থাৎ ব্যবসা পরিচালনা করতে গেলে অতিরিক্ত সরকারি নিয়ম, অনুমোদন, নীতি, লাইসেন্স ও প্রশাসনিক জটিলতা মোকাবিলা করতে হয়। বিশেষ করে নতুন কিছু করতে গেলেই পদে পদে বাধা দেওয়া হয়। এতে স্থানীয় ব্যবসা যেমন কম বাড়ছে, তেমনি রপ্তানিও বাধাগ্রস্ত হচ্ছে।

গতকাল সোমবার রাজধানীর গুলশানের একটি হোটেলে 'ইকোনমিক রিফর্ম সামিট' শীর্ষক এক সম্মেলনে অংশ নিয়ে এ কথা বলেন ব্যবসায়ীরা। সম্মেলনের উদ্বোধনী অনুষ্ঠানে প্রধান অতিথি ছিলেন বিএনপির স্থায়ী কমিটির সদস্য আমীর খসরু মাহমুদ চৌধুরী। বেসরকারি প্রতিষ্ঠান ভয়েস ফর রিফর্ম, ব্রেইন, ইনোভেশন কনসালটিং, ফিনটেক সোসাইটি ও নাগরিক কোয়ালিশন অনুষ্ঠানটির আয়োজন করে।

সম্মেলনের প্রথম দিন চারটি পৃথক অধিবেশন অনুষ্ঠিত হয়। তৃতীয় অধিবেশনে রপ্তানি বাজার সুরক্ষা ও রপ্তানি বৈচিত্র্যকরণ নিয়ে প্যানেল আলোচনায় অংশ নেন উৎপাদন ও সেবা খাতের উদ্যোক্তারা। এ সময় এপেক্স ফুটওয়্যারের ব্যবস্থাপনা পরিচালক (এমডি) সৈয়দ নাসিম মঞ্জুর বলেন, বাংলাদেশের ব্যবসা-বাণিজ্যে অতিরিক্ত নিয়ন্ত্রণের পরিবেশ রয়েছে। এ কারণে রপ্তানি সেভাবে বাড়বে না; বরং যেগুলো আছে সেগুলো টিকবে কি না সন্দেহ আছে। আর রপ্তানি বৈচিত্র্যের চিন্তাও করা যায় না।

রপ্তানি বৈচিত্র্য না হওয়ার পেছনে কাস্টমস প্রধান ভূমিকা রাখছে উল্লেখ করে নাসিম মঞ্জুর বলেন, 'ব্যবসায়ীদের প্রতিটি পর্যায়ে হয়রানির শিকার হতে হয়। আপনি যদি নতুন কিছু করতে চান, সেখানে পদে পদে বাধা দেওয়া হয়।'

নাসিম মঞ্জুর আরও বলেন, 'স্থানীয় উৎপাদন খাত শুধু বৈদেশিক মুদ্রা সাশ্রয় করে না, এটি কর্মসংস্থানও সৃষ্টি করে। যুক্তরাষ্ট্র এ কারণে স্থানীয় উৎপাদন বাড়াতে বিভিন্ন নীতি গ্রহণ করেছে। কিন্তু আমরা দেশে উৎপাদনমুখী প্রতিষ্ঠান সাড়ে ১৩ শতাংশ হারে সুদ দিচ্ছি। যেখানে ভারতে

বাংলাদেশের ব্যবসা-বাণিজ্যে অতিরিক্ত নিয়ন্ত্রণের পরিবেশ রয়েছে। এ কারণে রপ্তানি সেভাবে বাড়বে না; বরং যেগুলো আছে সেগুলো টিকবে কি না সন্দেহ আছে। আর রপ্তানি বৈচিত্র্যের চিন্তাও করা যায় না।

সৈয়দ নাসিম মঞ্জুর
ব্যবস্থাপনা পরিচালক, এপেক্স ফুটওয়্যার

সুদের হার ৭ শতাংশ, ভিয়েতনামে ৪ শতাংশ। তারপরও আশা করা হয় যে আমরা তাদের সঙ্গে প্রতিযোগিতা করব।'

নীতিনির্ধারকদের রপ্তানি পণ্যের বাজার ও ব্যাঙ্কিং ধারণার ঘাটতি রয়েছে বলে জানান শাশা ডেনিমসের এমডি শামস মাহমুদ। তিনি বলেন, 'রপ্তানিকারকেরা জানেন কীভাবে পণ্য বিক্রি ও প্রচারণা করতে হয়। কিন্তু নীতিনির্ধারকদের অনেকে তা জানেন না। তাঁরা এখনো এমন কিছু শব্দ ব্যবহার করেন, যা আন্তর্জাতিকভাবে 'আপত্তিকর'—যেমন "সস্তা শ্রম"। এটিকে জেরতারা ইতিবাচকভাবে নেন না। বরং বলা উচিত, আমরা প্রতিযোগিতামূলক দামে পণ্য সরবরাহ করতে পারি।'

ব্যাংকের চড়া সুদ ও কর-ব্যবস্থার চাপের কথাও তুলে ধরেন শামস মাহমুদ। তিনি বলেন, '৫ আগস্টের পরে বাংলাদেশ ব্যাংকের প্রতি কিছুটা আস্থা ফিরেছে। কিন্তু এখন আমরা এমন পরিস্থিতিতে আছি, যেখানে ব্যবসা করি ব্যাংককে চড়া সুদ দিতে আর সরকারকে নানা ন্যায্য-অন্যায্য কর দিই। তাহলে শ্রমিকের বেতন বাড়াব কীভাবে।'

শামস মাহমুদ বলেন, যুক্তরাষ্ট্রের পাল্টা শুল্ক আরোপের পরে বাংলাদেশে বিপুল ক্রয়াদেশ আসার সম্ভাবনা তৈরি হয়েছিল। কিন্তু বাস্তবে তা হয়নি। বরং গত বছর থেকে ইউডি (ইউটিলাইজেশন ডিক্লারেশন) কমেছে। অর্থাৎ বাংলাদেশ থেকে রপ্তানির পরিমাণ বাড়লেও, সেই রপ্তানিতে ব্যবহৃত কাঁচামাল (ইউডি) দেশের কারখানা থেকে আসছে না; অর্থাৎ ট্রান্সশিপমেন্ট বাড়ছে।

পলিসি এক্সচেঞ্জ বাংলাদেশের চেয়ারম্যান মাসরুর রিয়াজ বলেন, বাংলাদেশের বিনিয়োগ পরিস্থিতি দীর্ঘমেয়াদি পরিকল্পনার অভাবে পিছিয়ে আছে। দেশে জাতীয় বিনিয়োগনীতি নেই। ফলে বিদেশি ও স্থানীয় বিনিয়োগের মধ্যে সঠিক ভারসাম্য ও পরিকল্পনা নেই। অন্যান্য দেশের মতো বাংলাদেশে একটি পদ্ধতিগত বিনিয়োগ উন্নয়ন ফৌশল থাকা উচিত। এটি জাতীয় বাণিজ্য, রপ্তানি

ও আমদানি নীতির সঙ্গে সামঞ্জস্যপূর্ণ থাকবে।

আর্থিক প্রতিষ্ঠান বিভাগ বিলুপ্ত হবে

পৃথক অধিবেশনে বিএনপির স্থায়ী কমিটির সদস্য আমীর খসরু মাহমুদ চৌধুরী বলেন, 'বিএনপি ক্ষমতায় গেলে অর্থ মন্ত্রণালয়ের আর্থিক প্রতিষ্ঠান বিভাগ বিলুপ্ত করা হবে। এই বিভাগ তৈরি করা হয়েছে রাষ্ট্রীয় ব্যাংকগুলোকে নিয়ন্ত্রণ করতে। এর উদ্দেশ্য ছিল এমডি নিয়োগ ও পর্যবেক্ষণের লোক বসিয়ে লুটপাট করা। বিএনপি আগের বার ক্ষমতায় এসে এটি তুলে দিয়েছিল। কিন্তু শেখ হাসিনা এটি আবার ফিরিয়ে এনেছিলেন। বিএনপি ক্ষমতায় গেলে আবার এটি বিলুপ্ত করবে।'

আমীর খসরু আরও বলেন, আর্থিক খাতে সংস্কার করতে ও শৃঙ্খলা ফেরাতে হলে বাংলাদেশ ব্যাংককে পূর্ণ স্বাধীনতা দিতে হবে। শুধু স্বায়ত্তশাসন যথেষ্ট নয়, পূর্ণ স্বাধীনতা দিতে হবে। এ ছাড়া বিনিয়োগ বাড়াতে প্রয়োজনীয় সব ধরনের সংস্কার করা হবে।

জাতীয় রাজস্ব বোর্ড (এনবিআর) দুই ভাগ করে কী লাভ হয়েছে, এ প্রশ্নও তোলেন আমীর খসরু মাহমুদ চৌধুরী। তাঁর ধারণা, এতে কোনো লাভ হবে না। কারণ, দুই ভাগেই আমলারা আছেন। এনবিআর নিয়ে বিএনপির ভিন্ন পরিকল্পনা আছে বলে জানান তিনি।

আমলাতন্ত্র প্রসঙ্গে আমীর খসরু বলেন, বিএনপি ক্ষমতায় গেলে আমলাতন্ত্রকে চ্যালেঞ্জ করবে না, জবাবদিহিরও কিছু নেই। বরং আমলাদের দায়িত্ব কমিয়ে আনা হবে। সরকার পরিচালনার সব ক্ষেত্রে ক্ষমতার বিকেন্দ্রীকরণ হবে। সেই সঙ্গে নীতিনির্ধারণের দায়িত্ব আমলাতন্ত্র নয়, নীতিনির্ধারকদের হাতেই থাকবে।

ঢাকা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের উন্নয়ন অধ্যয়ন বিভাগের অধ্যাপক রাশেদ আল মাহমুদ তিতুমীর বলেন, 'অতীত সরকারের প্রবৃদ্ধির মডেলে দারিদ্র্য ও বেকারত্ব সৃষ্টি হয়েছিল। তাদের তথাকথিত অর্থনৈতিক অলৌকিকতার গল্পের আড়ালে লুকিয়ে ছিল কঠিন বাস্তবতা। আজ সেই বাস্তবতা প্রকাশ্যে এসেছে। বাংলাদেশ এখন ঐতিহাসিক সন্ধিক্ষণে। হয় আমরা এই স্থবিরতা মেনে নেব, না হয় অভূতপূর্ব সমৃদ্ধির পথে এগিয়ে যাব।'

অনুষ্ঠানে প্যানেল আলোচনায় জ্বালানিবিশেষজ্ঞ মতামিম বলেন, 'আমরা বর্তমানে তীব্র জ্বালানিসংকটের মধ্য দিয়ে যাচ্ছি। গত ১৫ বছরে নিজস্ব জ্বালানি উৎস কাজে লাগাতে বিনিয়োগ হয়নি, বরং ৩০ বিলিয়ন বা ৩ হাজার কোটি ডলার ব্যয় হয়েছে বিদ্যুৎকেন্দ্র নির্মাণে। কেননা এখানেই সবচেয়ে বেশি দুর্নীতির সুযোগ ছিল।'

