

আলোচনা সভায় বাণিজ্য উপদেষ্টা

বাণিজ্য আলোচনায় বড় বাধা সীমিত রফতানি পণ্য

নিজস্ব প্রতিবেদক ■

বাংলাদেশের রফতানি পণ্যে বৈচিত্র্য নেই। সীমিত পণ্যের ওপর নির্ভর করে দেশের রফতানি বাজার, যা বাণিজ্য আলোচনায় বড় বাধা বলে মন্তব্য করেছেন বাণিজ্য উপদেষ্টা শেখ বশিরউদ্দীন। 'রিফ্লেকশনস অ্যান্ড ওয়ে ফরওয়ার্ড: বিল্ডিং ন্যাশনাল ক্যাপাবিলিটিস ইন ট্রেড নেগোসিয়েশনস' শীর্ষক আলোচনা সভায় তিনি এ কথা বলেন। রাজধানীর একটি হোটেলে গতকাল যৌথভাবে এ অনুষ্ঠানের আয়োজন করে বাণিজ্য মন্ত্রণালয় ও জাতিসংঘ উন্নয়ন কর্মসূচি (ইউএনডিপি)। সহযোগিতায় ছিল ইউকে ইন্টারন্যাশনাল ডেভেলপমেন্ট।

অনুষ্ঠানে প্রধান অতিথির বক্তব্যে বাণিজ্য উপদেষ্টা বলেন, 'রফতানি পণ্যে বৈচিত্র্যের অভাব বাণিজ্য আলোচনার জন্য অন্যতম বড় সমস্যা। আমাদের প্রধান রফতানি পণ্য খুব সীমিত। এছাড়া পর্যাপ্ত উৎপাদন সক্ষমতা বা কাঁচামালও নেই। বেশির ভাগ কাঁচামাল আমদানি করে সামান্য মূল্য সংযোজন করে আমরা তা বিক্রি করি।' এজন্য রপ্তানি অব অরিজিন বা উৎপত্তি সম্পর্কিত নিয়মগুলো বাণিজ্য আলোচনায় বিশেষ গুরুত্ব বহন করে বলেও মন্তব্য করেন তিনি।

শেখ বশিরউদ্দীন বলেন, 'যুক্তরাষ্ট্রের সঙ্গে আলোচনার পর অনেকেই প্রশ্ন করেছিলেন—আমাদের এগিয়ে যাওয়ার পথ কোনটি? আমরা বিশ্বাস করি যে আমরা আরো ভালো কিছু পাওয়ার যোগ্য। কিন্তু কী চাই ও কীভাবে চাই—এটি পরিষ্কারভাবে নির্ধারণ করতে হবে।'

ভবিষ্যতের বাণিজ্য আলোচনা বাংলাদেশের জন্য একটি দীর্ঘমেয়াদি চ্যালেঞ্জ—উল্লেখ করে তিনি বলেন, 'খাদ্য ও জ্বালানি—এ দুটি মৌলিক বিষয়ের ওপর নির্ভর করে আমরা ঘাটতি পূরণের চেষ্টা করি। তাই যেকোনো আলোচনার সময় এ মৌলিক বিষয়গুলো ঘিরেই কৌশল তৈরি করতে হয়।'

বিশেষ অতিথির বক্তব্যে প্রধান উপদেষ্টার আন্তর্জাতিক সম্পর্ক বিষয়ক বিশেষ দূত লুৎফে সিদ্দিকী বলেন, 'যুক্তরাষ্ট্রের সঙ্গে আমরা বাণিজ্য আলোচনা শুরু করেছি, কিন্তু শেষ করতে পারিনি। এর একটি বড় কারণ অভ্যন্তরীণ আলোচনা পদ্ধতি। প্রতিনিধিরা চাহিদার তালিকা পাঠায়, তারপর কর্মকর্তারা শিল্প মন্ত্রণালয় ও জাতীয় রাজস্ব বোর্ডকে (এনবিআর) চিঠি দেয়। এর জবাব পেতে কখনো কখনো মাসের পর মাস অপেক্ষা করতে হয়। ছয় মাস পর উত্তর আসে। তখন দেখা যায় সবাই সবকিছু ভুলে গেছে। এটা হওয়া উচিত নয়।'

প্রমাণভিত্তিক আলোচনার সংস্কৃতি তৈরি হয়নি উল্লেখ করে তিনি বলেন, 'কখনো কখনো কিছু জ্যেষ্ঠ কর্মকর্তার কথা শুনে মনে হয়েছে আমরা অপরিপক্ব। আপনি একটি পেশায় আছেন, সাধারণের মতো কথা বলা ঠিক

নয়। তথ্য নিয়ে আলোচনা, ডাটা যাচাই, প্রমাণ ও পরীক্ষা করে এটি হওয়া উচিত। কিন্তু আমাদের মধ্যে এ সংস্কৃতি নেই।'

অনুষ্ঠানে বাংলাদেশে নিযুক্ত ব্রিটিশ হাইকমিশনার সারা হ কুক বলেন, 'অন্তর্ভুক্তিমূলক অর্থনৈতিক প্রবৃদ্ধির অন্যতম চালিকাশক্তি বাণিজ্য। এটি কর্মসংস্থান সৃষ্টি করে ও দারিদ্র্য থেকে উত্তরণের সবচেয়ে কার্যকর উপায়গুলোর একটি। তবে বর্তমানে বৈশ্বিক বাণিজ্য ব্যবস্থা চাপের মুখে রয়েছে। সুরক্ষাবাদ বাড়ছে, সরবরাহ শৃঙ্খল ভেঙে যেতে দেখেছি। বৈশ্বিক বাণিজ্য নীতিগুলোও পুনর্বিবেচিত হচ্ছে।'

তিনি বলেন, 'এলডিসি উত্তরণ বাংলাদেশের জন্য অতিরিক্ত চ্যালেঞ্জ নিয়ে আসবে। বৈশ্বিক বাজারে আরো কঠিন প্রতিযোগিতার মুখোমুখি হতে হবে। তাই বাণিজ্য শৃঙ্খলের ওপর নির্ভরশীলতা কমিয়ে অর্থনীতিকে আরো উন্মুক্ত করতে হবে। বিশ্বজুড়ে অংশীদারদের সঙ্গে বাজারে প্রবেশাধিকার নিশ্চিত করতে হবে।'

সারা হ কুক আরো বলেন, 'বাণিজ্যনীতি জটিল ও আলোচনা কঠিন। এটি রাজনৈতিক ও টেকনিক্যাল। বাংলাদেশকে সফল হতে হলে তীক্ষ্ণ মেধা, শক্তিশালী প্রতিষ্ঠান ও একটি সুস্পষ্ট কৌশল নির্ধারণ করতে হবে। নিজেদের স্বার্থ কী ও বাণিজ্য অংশীদারদের স্বার্থ কী তা অবশ্যই বুঝতে হবে। একটি দেশ যখন বাণিজ্য শাসন ব্যবস্থা উন্মুক্ত করে, তখন দেশের অভ্যন্তরে কেউ লাভবান হয় আবার কেউ ক্ষতিগ্রস্ত হয়—যদিও সামগ্রিকভাবে অর্থনীতিই লাভবান হয়।' তাই বাণিজ্যনীতি

সঠিকভাবে তৈরি করা অত্যন্ত গুরুত্বপূর্ণ বলেও মনে করেন তিনি। ব্রিটিশ রাষ্ট্রদূত বলেন, 'একটি ভালো বাণিজ্য চুক্তি ও একটি উৎকৃষ্ট চুক্তির মধ্যে পার্থক্য নির্ভর করে আলোচনার টেবিলে বসা মানুষদের দক্ষতা এবং বাইরে থেকে যারা সহায়তা করেন তাদের সক্ষমতার ওপর। আইনি সূক্ষ্ম বিষয়গুলো বোঝা, ভিন্ন খাতের ওপর অর্থনৈতিক প্রভাব বিশ্লেষণ, নিজের শক্তি ও দুর্বলতা জানা—এসবই অপরিহার্য। বাংলাদেশে মেধাবী মানুষ রয়েছে। এখন চ্যালেঞ্জ হলো তাদের প্রশিক্ষণ দেয়া, ক্ষমতায়িত করা ও ধরে রাখা।'

সভাপতির বক্তব্যে বাণিজ্য মন্ত্রণালয়ের সচিব মাহবুবুর রহমান বলেন, 'বাণিজ্য আলোচনা সহজ বিষয় নয়। এটি কেবল গুঁড় বা বাণিজ্য সম্পর্কিত নয়; এর সঙ্গে অনেক বিষয় জড়িত। এতে বাণিজ্য নীতি সম্পর্কিত স্বচ্ছতা এবং স্বাস্থ্য, পরিবেশ ও শ্রম বিষয়ক সমস্যাসহ আরো বিষয়গুলো মোকাবেলা করতে হয়। এ কাজে অভিজ্ঞতা ও বিশেষজ্ঞ প্রয়োজন।' অনুষ্ঠানে আরো বক্তব্য দেন রপ্তানি উন্নয়ন ব্যুরোর (ইপিবি) অতিরিক্ত সচিব মো. আবদুর রহিম খান, ইউএনডিপি বাংলাদেশের স্থায়ী প্রতিনিধি স্টেফান লিলার, কান্ট্রি ইকোনমিক অ্যাডভাইজার ওয়েইস প্যারে, র্যাপিড চেয়ারম্যান মোহাম্মদ আবদুর রাজ্জাক প্রমুখ।



Govt to form expert panel for trade talks

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh will form an expert panel for negotiations as the country seeks to sign deals with major trading partners ahead of its graduation to a developing nation from the least developed country (LDC) category.

The country has been negotiating with nearly a dozen countries to sign free trade agreements (FTAs), preferential trade agreements (PTAs), comprehensive economic partnership agreements (CEPAs), and economic partnership agreements (EPAs) to retain preferential trade benefits following the LDC graduation slated for November next year.

If the new resource pool is approved, it will engage in negotiations with major trading partners to sign deals in line with government rules and regulations.

"We are trying to form a pool of resources for negotiations to sign the trade agreements," Commerce Secretary Mahbubur Rahman said at an event titled "Building national capabilities in trade negotiations: reflections & way forward" held at the InterContinental Dhaka hotel yesterday.

Negotiations for signing a trade deal with Singapore will begin soon, while talks are underway for a similar one with Korea, the secretary said.

A team from Bangladesh is now engaged in the final round of negotiations in Tokyo to finalise an EPA, which the two nations may sign this year, Rahman added.

If signed, it will be Bangladesh's first full-fledged economic partnership agreement, as previously the South Asian nation had signed only a PTA with Bhutan in December 2020.

Commerce Adviser Sk. Bashir Uddin said by strengthening policy frameworks and institutional support, the government aims to ensure that this pool evolves as a dynamic force, fully equipped to navigate the complexities of international trade and safeguard Bangladesh's economic interests in the years ahead.

Built on the foundation of continuous learning and adaptability, the trade negotiators' pool is poised to deliver an enduring impact, Bashir Uddin also said.

British High Commissioner to Bangladesh Sarah Cooke said her country will continue extending duty-free market access to Bangladeshi goods in the post-LDC period.

She also expressed her country's interest in sharing expertise on trade negotiations with Bangladesh.

Chief Adviser's Special Envoy on International Affairs Lutfey Siddiqi said Bangladesh's export basket is very narrow and negotiators will face many difficulties with different countries.

Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Programme Stefan Liller and Additional Commerce Secretary Md Abdur Rahim Khan also spoke at the event.



Bangladesh has already met the criteria for graduation in all three categories: per capita income, human preferences. Citing domestic and international pressures—nearly 40 percent currency devaluation, high interest could cut annual exports by up to 14 percent, or \$7 billion, crippling readymade garments and footwear that make up almost 90 percent destinations. Starting negotiations early will allow time to build consensus, align domestic policies with global standards, diversify

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Bangladesh has already met the criteria for graduation in all three categories: per capita income, human asset index, and economic vulnerability index.

Even so, leading business figures have urged the government to seek a six-year deferral of LDC graduation, warning the economy is unprepared for the loss of vital trade

preferences.

Citing domestic and international pressures—nearly 40 percent currency devaluation, high interest rates, and a fraught investment climate—they petitioned to delay the transition from November 2026 to 2032.

Their main concern is the loss of duty-free, quota-free access to the European Union, which they estimate

could cut annual exports by up to 14 percent, or \$7 billion, crippling readymade garments and footwear that make up almost 90 percent of exports.

Experts stress Bangladesh must negotiate trade deals to preserve market access after graduation.

Without talks, the country faces higher tariffs in the EU, UK, and other

destinations.

Starting negotiations early will allow time to build consensus, align domestic policies with global standards, diversify export destinations, and reduce overreliance on a few markets.

Most importantly, timely deals will ensure a smoother transition and protect jobs and growth driven by exports.

Trump offers tariff relief to some trade partners

REUTERS

US President Donald Trump signed an executive order offering some tariff exemptions as soon as Monday to trading partners who strike deals on industrial exports such as nickel, gold and other metals, as well as pharmaceutical compounds and chemicals.

Trump has spent his first seven months in office building up massive tariff increases to reorder the global trading system, cut US trade deficits and extract concessions from trading partner countries in negotiations.

His latest order, opens new tab identifies more than 45 categories for zero import tariffs from "aligned partners" who clinch framework pacts to cut Trump's "reciprocal" tariffs and duties imposed under the Section 232 national security statute.

Friday's order brings US tariffs in line with its commitments in existing framework deals, including those with allies such as Japan and the European Union.

Eligible trading partners will be those who strike deals on industrial exports such as nickel, gold and other metals, as well as pharmaceutical compounds and chemicals

The exemptions for countries with US trade deals are set to begin at 12:01 a.m. EDT/0401 GMT on Monday, it said. In the order, Trump says his willingness to reduce tariffs depends on the "scope and economic value of a trading partner's commitments to the United States in its agreement on reciprocal trade" and US national interests.

The cuts cover items that "cannot be grown, mined, or naturally produced in the United States" or produced in sufficient volume to meet domestic demand.

A White House official said it also creates new carveouts for some agricultural products, aircraft and parts, and non-patented articles for use in pharmaceuticals.

In situations where a country has struck a "reciprocal" trade deal with the United States, this will allow the US Trade Representative, the Commerce Department and customs to waive tariffs on covered imports without a new executive order from Trump, the official said.

The zero-tariff items identified in the order include graphite and various forms of nickel, a key ingredient in stainless steel manufacturing and electric vehicle batteries.

Also covered are compounds used in generic pharmaceuticals, including the anesthetic lidocaine and reagents used in medical diagnostic tests.

The order encompasses various types of gold imports, from powders and leaf to bullion, a key import from Switzerland, which is struggling with US tariffs of 39 percent as it has not yet reached a trade deal.





Md Nasir Khan

Red tape leaves leather sector a sleeping giant

Says Jennys Shoes Chairman Md Nasir Khan in an interview with The Daily Star

JAGARAN CHAKMA

The country's leather footwear sector has the raw materials, skilled labour and a strong place in the global supply chain.

Still, exports have long remained a sleeping giant due mainly to a lack of trust in local entrepreneurs and a system riddled with flaws, according to Md Nasir Khan, chairman of Jennys Shoes.

While leather footwear exports by neighbouring Vietnam have surged to \$27 billion, Bangladesh remains stuck at \$1.2 billion.

Khan said this sector should already have crossed \$10 billion in exports.

"We have everything, leather, labour, logistics. What we do not have is a policy structure that allows us to grow," he said in an interview with The Daily Star.

"It is not a lack of talent. It is a lack of trust in our entrepreneurs and a broken system that rewards paperwork over performance," said Khan, also the vice-president of the Leathergoods and Footwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association of Bangladesh.

of in-bond and out-bond records, often by hand, he said.

"You apply to import 100 units. They approve 50. You export using those 50, then reapply, wait again. This is not a trade facilitation, it is a trade controller," said the chairman of Jennys Shoes.

Jenny exports mainly to Japan, Italy, Germany, France and the United States. In the US market, it supplies only non-leather sports shoes. Skechers and

raw materials.

Now the shoemaker advocated for phasing out the bond system and replacing it with a value-addition model.

He believes this would allow businesses to import raw materials freely, provided they ensure a minimum share of local value addition, around 20 to 25 percent, before exporting.

"If I know I must retain 25 percent value locally, I will invest in local

functioned properly. Consequently, the sector cannot obtain globally recognised certifications such as the Leather Working Group (LWG) standard. Without it, exporters cannot access premium markets or meet the demands of environmentally conscious buyers.

"We spent thousands of crores building the leather park. But without functioning compliance, our own manufacturers cannot use our leather. Global buyers would not touch it. So, we import leather just to export products made with it," Khan said.

Calling this "a tragedy", he added that countries, including France, had offered to help Bangladesh set up a certification framework free of charge, but indecision at the policy level blocked progress.

For two decades, the government has provided cash incentives of 10 to 15 percent on export earnings. Yet growth has been negligible.

According to the shoemaker, it is like giving grapes to a patient who needs heart surgery. "You cannot fix a broken system with sweeteners."

He argued that incentives only

TAKEAWAYS FROM INTERVIEW

Policy failures

There is a lack of policy structure that holds the industry back

Customs bond system is called "obsolete, corrupt, and counterproductive"

Businesses face 30+ agency approvals just to import raw materials

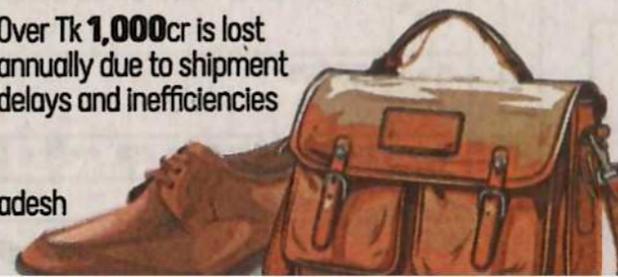
Comparison & lost opportunities

While Vietnam exports \$27b in footwear, Bangladesh's leather footwear exports stuck at \$1.2b

Over Tk 1,000cr is lost annually due to shipment delays and inefficiencies

Certification challenges

Inadequate CETP facility blocks Bangladesh from securing LWG certification



a sleeping giant due mainly to a lack of trust in local entrepreneurs and a system riddled with flaws, according to Md Nasir Khan, chairman of Jennys Shoes.

While leather footwear exports by neighbouring Vietnam have surged to \$27 billion, Bangladesh remains stuck at \$1.2 billion.

Khan said this sector should already have crossed \$10 billion in exports.

"We have everything, leather, labour, logistics. What we do not have is a policy structure that allows us to grow," he said in an interview with The Daily Star.

"It is not a lack of talent. It is a lack of trust in our entrepreneurs and a broken system that rewards paperwork over performance," said Khan, also the vice-president of the Leathergoods and Footwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association of Bangladesh.

During the interview, he described how policy failures, red tape and missed opportunities have kept leather footwear from becoming one of the country's export success stories.

At the centre of his criticism is the customs bonded warehouse system.

Introduced more than 30 years ago, it was meant to allow duty-free imports of raw materials for export industries.

Khan called it "obsolete, corrupt, and counterproductive" in today's fast-moving trade environment.

"This system is like trying to run 5G through a dial-up modem," he said.

To get a bond licence, the shoemaker said businesses need to collect documents from as many as 31 different government agencies.

Even then, importing raw materials requires item-by-item approvals, capacity certificates and repeated filing

Jennys Shoes.

Jenny exports mainly to Japan, Italy, Germany, France and the United States. In the US market, it supplies only non-leather sports shoes. Skechers and

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According to the shoemaker, it is like giving grapes to a patient who needs heart surgery. "You cannot fix a broken system with sweeteners."

He argued that incentives only entrench inefficiency if the system itself is broken.

"We have had 15 percent incentives for two decades, but we are still at \$1.2 billion in exports. Clearly, the problem is structural, not financial."

Unless the government shifts from regulation to facilitation, Khan warned Bangladesh risks losing out on the next wave of industrial leadership.

He outlined the steps he believes are urgent.

Those include replacing the bond system with a value-addition model, setting up functioning LWG certification for the sector, reducing dependence on bureaucratic approvals, digitising and decentralising customs clearance, promoting local sourcing and expanding opportunities for small and medium enterprises.

"We do not need aid. We need smart policies," he concluded.

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Incentives vs reform

Cash incentives without reform will not be helpful



Steve Madden are among its biggest buyers, placing regular large orders.

Referring to industry estimates, Khan said that between Tk 50 crore and Tk 100 crore is spent each year on maintaining bond-related infrastructure and manpower. Over Tk 100 crore goes on unofficial fees, while more than Tk 1,000 crore is lost annually to shipment delays and bureaucratic inefficiency.

"And this is all for a system that barely prevents leakage," he added.

Vietnam, he said, has reached \$27 billion in leather footwear exports with simpler rules and stronger local value chains, despite starting later compared with Bangladesh and without its own

materials. I will work with local suppliers. But right now, I spend more time managing paperwork and bribes than managing production," he said.

"Such models are already followed in other export economies, shifting the focus from compliance policing to economic performance."

Despite producing high-quality leather, Bangladesh exports more than 75 percent of it in semi-finished form, mainly to China and India, because it has failed to meet international environmental standards.

A key barrier is the central effluent treatment plant (CETP) at the Savar tannery estate, which has never



Solar import taxes dim Bangladesh apparel's green ambitions

RENEWABLE ENERGY - BANGLADESH

REYAD HOSSAIN

Bangladesh's apparel sector is keen to expand rooftop solar, but entrepreneurs say steep import taxes are inflating installation costs and slowing large-scale adoption which could save the government Tk2,500 crore each year on primary fuel imports.

The country's largest export sector has been racing to cut carbon emissions to meet global compliance, and the government has pledged to raise the renewable share of power generation to 20% by 2030 from around 5% now.

But high taxes on imported equipment are driving up costs, setting those 30% to 50% higher than in India, some entrepreneurs have said.

Installing solar panels— known as photovoltaic generator sets for industrial use requires 13 types of equipment. While panels and inverters are taxed at just 1%, some of the rest, representing about half of the total installation cost, face duties as high as 62% or 77%.

Industry leaders say this raises installation costs by about one-third.

Though the central bank has creat

HURDLES TO SOLAR IN INDUSTRIES

IMPORT DUTY ON SOLAR EQUIPMENT

- Solar panels and inverters: **1%**
- Accessories: from **32% to 77%**
- High import tax increases costs by over **30%**
- Accessories can't avail 1% import duty facility as they're not usage-specific

CURRENT SOLAR PRODUCTION

Textile: 50 MW	RMG: Unknown

TEXTILE, RMG ROOFTOPS COULD ACCOMMODATE 2 GW SOLAR

- This would meet 20% of sector's power demand
- Tk2,500cr could be saved on energy imports annually

ed a green fund to support renewable energy at low interest rates, investors complain of procedural hurdles and insufficient financing.

For years, the government has provided various benefits such as reduced import duties for private sector power producers using conventional fossil fuels. According to a National Board of Revenue (NBR) circular last year, private sector power producers are exempted from all import duties except for a 5% VAT.

But, renewable users, though highlighted much in government policy and focus, are left out, entrepreneurs have said. To achieve its renewable energy goal, the government should eliminate import duties on solar equipment and instead provide incentives to encourage investment in green energy transition, they have felt.

Why solar panels here cost so high
NZ Textile Limited, one of the country's largest textile mills, has already installed about 10 megawatts of solar power, the highest among textile mills. The company's goal is to expand capacity to 30 megawatts from solar.

Its managing director, Saleudh Zaman Khan,

SEE PAGE 2



explained, "Taxes on imported solar equipment have increased our costs by more than 30%. A project that costs Tk2 crore in India ends up costing Tk3 crore in Bangladesh. That is why we are lagging behind in cost competitiveness."

Fatullah Fashions Limited, a US Green Building Council-certified platinum-rated green garment factory in Narayanganj, has set a target of becoming net-zero carbon within the next five years, meaning that all of its electricity demand will be met through its own solar power. The company has already begun generating some electricity through solar installations, with additional capacity under construction.

"We are saving foreign currency by generating electricity through solar in the private sector," its managing director Fazlee Shamim Ehsan said.

"In this case, the government should be providing subsidies," he added.

Rising Group, one of the country's leading textile and garment producers, is currently generating approximately 4 megawatts of electricity from solar and has plans to expand by another 10 megawatts.

Its managing director, Mahmud Hasan Khan Babu, however, told TBS, "The excessive import tax on solar equipment is one of the key

obstacles."

Entrepreneurs also argue that the cost of setting up a solar power plant of the same capacity in Bangladesh is about 50% higher than in neighbouring India, largely due to import tax.

Among textile mills, spinning mills consume the most electricity, much of it generated through captive power systems running on gas and imported fuel, placing a heavy burden on the government.

According to the Bangladesh Textile Mills Association (BTMA), out of 527 spinning mills, around 40 have installed solar panels, collectively generating about 50 megawatts for production purposes. Meanwhile, many garment factories have also installed solar panels, though exact figures on the number of factories and total power generated were not available from the industry's two main associations.

Import duties not lowered in fear of misuse

In 2023, in response to an application by an importer, the Customs Policy Wing of the NBR issued an explanation, or advance ruling, stating why the 1% import duty facility could not be applicable for 11 types of equipment under 'photovoltaic generator sets.'

It clarified that since some of the equipment are considered 'parts of general use' and 'not identifiable as

parts suitable for use solely or principally with a particular kind of machine,' they cannot qualify for the reduced tax facility.

At the time, a customs official involved in the ruling told The Business Standard on condition of anonymity, "Given the risk of misuse and considering the interests of local manufacturers of the same equipment, no exemption can be granted in this case."

NBR Chairman Abdur Rahman Khan also told TBS, "We have already given concessions on certain solar equipment, including some in the last budget. However, many of these items are also used in sectors other than solar, and we must protect domestic industries. Otherwise, local manufacturers of similar products will claim their interests are being ignored."

"If there is a reasonable demand, changes can only be made in the next budget" –he added.

Local solar equipment manufacturers have also complained that the import tax facility is being misused. A leader of the Solar Module Manufacturers' Association of Bangladesh (SMMAB) – a platform of local solar equipment producers – told TBS on condition of anonymity, "If industries are given tax benefits, they are being misused." He added that, in the interest of local industries, the government could require that a certain percentage

of solar-related equipment be sourced from domestic manufacturers.

However, Golam Baki Masud, general secretary of the association, told TBS, "In the case of industries installing rooftop solar panels, the government can provide exemptions only for a few specified items, based on specific orders."

However, NZ Textile MD Saleudh Zaman Khan argued that most of the equipment subject to high import duties is not yet manufactured in Bangladesh. "Even though some equipment is manufactured locally, the quality does not meet industry standards," he said, stressing that imports are unavoidable. On the issue of misuse, he proposed introducing safeguards, saying, "To prevent abuse outside the industry, Buet's expert panel could issue certification or another form of verification. But cutting off the head to cure a headache is not the solution."

2000 MW solar potential in the apparel sector

Bangladesh's main market – the European Union – where the country sends about 50% of its total exports, has in recent years adopted several initiatives to reduce fossil fuel dependency in production and promote renewable energy in supply chains. These include the EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD), the EU Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism

(CBAM) – a carbon tariff on carbon-intensive products – and the German Supply Chain Due Diligence Act.

Through the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, the EU will impose additional taxes on its own buyers for these industries in the supply chain, based on a certain level of carbon emissions.

This means Bangladeshi export industries will need to shift away from fossil fuels and move toward renewable energy in production to remain competitive in export markets.

Otherwise, exporters risk losing market access. Saleudh Zaman Khan, also the vice president of BTMA, said the available rooftop space in Bangladesh's textile and garment sector could accommodate up to 2,000 MW of solar capacity, meeting nearly 20% of the sector's total electricity demand.

According to his calculations, this would generate electricity worth Tk2,500 crore annually and cut energy costs (fuel and gas-based) by the same amount. It would also reduce the government's reliance on fuel imports and save significant foreign exchange.

He added that if the government waives import duties, it would ultimately benefit both the economy and the government in the long run.