

Chittagong Port facing acute cargo-handling problems

From Nurul Alam

CHITTAGONG, Aug 19: Chittagong Port, the major seaport of the country, faces an acute crisis in cargo-handling operations due to shortage of modern equipment and other logistics, sources concerned said.

Foreign vessels calling at this port have to suffer much because it takes 6 to 7 days to complete loading and unloading of cargo, instead of 3 to 4 days.

The sources further said that even one year after inauguration, the two Multipurpose Berths (MPB) could not yet be pressed into full operation only because of equipment shortage.

The two MPBs built as container terminals at a cost of over Taka 400 crore, were inaugurated by Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia on August 18 last year.

Port officials said the MPBs were put into partial operation despite inadequacy of equipment and other logistics.

Construction of the two container terminals was taken up in 1984 and completed in July 1992 and those were meant for coping with the growing size of container cargo at Chittagong Port amid a global switchover from bulk cargo to containerization of freight, port officials pointed

out. Shipping in containers is now preferred by the consignees, they say, container cargo at the port has increased more than ten times, in the past ten years, in fiscal '93-'94, the port handled 1,74,958 containers as against only 15,000 containers in '83-'84 fiscal, port sources said.

Moreover, the volume of cargo handled by the port rose to 7.9 million metric tons (MT) in fiscal '93-'94, an increase by over a million metric tons during the past ten years. The port's annual handling capacity is only six million MT.

Dilly-dallying tactics and lengthy procedures followed by port officials had allegedly delayed the procurement of essential equipment needed to speed-up the port's handling operations.

When contacted, the port authorities said that tenders had recently been floated to procure the equipment. But it may take another six to seven months to get delivery of those.

A senior port official, preferring anonymity, said "the present crisis is mainly due to the marked increase in containerised cargo because the existing facilities at this port are basically designed to handle bulk cargo."



Lankan Prime Minister Chandrika Kumaratunga kneels in front of her mother, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, yesterday after winning the elections in Colombo. Bandaranaike became the world's first elected woman prime minister in 1960. She is now a member of her daughter's cabinet. — AFP photo

Lankan polls free, fair: Int'l observers

COLOMBO, Aug 20: A group of international observers today described Sri Lanka's parliamentary polls as "free and fair" but urged the government to disband armed groups that functioned as political parties, reports AFP.

The majority of observers have the opinion that the elections were free and fair," the 44-member observer group said in their report to the elections commissioner. A summary of the report was released to the press.

The team noted that only 2.32 per cent of some 600,000 voters in the embattled northern Jaffna peninsula had voted. Jaffna is virtually under the control of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rebels.

The LTTE boycotted the polls and prevented people in areas under their control from voting.

The international monitors urged the authorities to disband the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), a pro-government militant group that controls some islets off the Jaffna coast.

The EPDP contested the elections and won nine of 10 seats on offer in the Jaffna district. Their seats are crucial because the People's Alliance which won the election has only a slender majority of one seat.

The group of observers strongly urges the government to ensure that political organisations should not also serve as armed units authorised by the government to provide security," the observers said.

"Such political organisations should be disbanded and should not be allowed to infringe — or appear to infringe — upon the rights of other legitimate political organisations in those areas," the group said in the report.

The 44-member team from 11 countries was invited by Elections Commissioner Chandrananda De Silva at the request of Sri Lanka's political parties, to report on the conduct of the August 16 polls won by the opposition People's Alliance.

The international group included lawyers, parliamentarians and former diplomats from Australia, Bangladesh, Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Guyana, India, Malaysia, Pakistan and the United States.

PDB project

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concrete electric poles for the project to an Indian company, Jindal Steel, in 1992, fuelling complaints that the contract was biased.

Local bidders had then alleged that the PDB gave the contract to the Indian supplier at the insistence of the World Bank ignoring more competitive local bids.

They claimed that by refusing the local manufacturers, the PDB had to pay more for the imported poles, besides paying import duties.

The project is scheduled to be completed by June, 1996. The project is intended to maintain, expand and install new lines in Rangamati, Chandpur, Brahmanbaria, Bhairab Bazar, Netrokona, Manikganj, Gazipur, Narayanganj, Munshiganj, Ishwardi, Narail, Gopalganj, Syedpur, Bhola, Jhalakati and Pirozpur.

Coal exploration

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The government will get an annual leasing fee for the land at a rate of Taka 50 per hectare. During extraction of minerals, the company will pay six per cent of the extracted coal's value as royalty and also other taxes under the law of the land.

The company will also be allowed to export coal after meeting the local requirement. BHP is expected to start exploration within a month using its own equipment and machinery.

Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Dr Khandaker Mosharrar Hossain, Australian High Commissioner in Bangladesh Kenneth Aspinall, Mission Chief of the United States in Bangladesh JP Nakh, Chairman of Petrobangla S K M Abdullah, Director General of the Geological Survey of Bangladesh Dr Mojibur Rahman and others were present at the signing ceremony.

Welcoming the agreement, the Energy Minister said the project would play a positive role in the development of energy resources in Bangladesh. He said that the government has been encouraging private sector initiatives in its efforts to exploit the country's untapped energy and mineral resources.

He mentioned that there has been tremendous response from private investors at home and abroad to invest in Bangladesh in the energy, mineral and power sectors.

The Midnight File

Arafat, Nahayan hold talks

GENEVA, Aug 20: PLO leader Yasser Arafat and the President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Sheikh Zaid Bin Sultan Al-Nahayan met in Geneva for private talks today, a spokesman for the UAE mission said. He declined to give any more details. Relations between Arafat and Gulf Arab states have been cool since the PLO adopted a pro-Iraqi stance following Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait. But Arafat met King Fahd of Saudi Arabia about three months ago, reports Reuter.

Rockets hit Kabul: 20 killed

ISLAMABAD, Aug 20: Twenty people were killed and 49 injured when forces opposed to Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani rained rockets and mortar bombs on the capital Kabul today, the official Kabul Radio said. The radio, monitored in Islamabad, said more than 100 rockets and mortar bombs were fired into Kabul's residential areas by anti-Rabbani militias controlled by Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and northern warlord General Abdul Rashid Dostum, reports Reuter.

Zaire seals border with Rwanda

BUKAVU, Zaire Aug 20: Zairian paratroopers sealed the border with Rwanda Saturday, dropping a barrier across a narrow frontier bridge leading to Bukavu and its already choked, squalid squatter camps, reports AP.

Tens of thousands of frightened Rwandans were stranded on their own side of the border, unable to reach Bukavu's uncertain sanctuary. Thousands of others had pressed across the bridge earlier in the day.

French troops who toiled to keep a steady flow moving across the bridge said the Zairians dropped the barricade at their end at 11:50 GMT. The Zairian government ordered the border closed Friday.

Aid workers said about 25,000 refugees crossed into Bukavu on Friday and that Saturday's flow was significantly larger as the Monday deadline approached for the withdrawal of French soldiers from a protective zone they established in southwestern Rwanda in June.

"We don't know what will happen when the word gets out that Zaire is closing the border. We don't know if that will make people stay where they are now or create a panic and a rush for the border," said Nina Winquist, the spokeswoman for the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Tens of thousands of people are still on the roads moving toward Bukavu. Ms Winquist estimated 25,000 trudged toward Zaire along the road from Gikongoro and that the French had estimated another 20,000 or more were traveling down the road from Kibuye.

Aid workers said closing the border would leave tens of thousands of people stranded on the Rwandan side of the bridge and could hamper the French withdrawal by clogging the roads.

"If they are backed up here behind a clogged border, it could lead to more tension and aggressive actions," said Ms. Winquist.

Many of the arrivals are refugees who had stopped in Cyangugu on the Rwanda side of the border but now were

BRDB project

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While the CIDA and Bangladesh government would fund the project, the project itself would fund a major portion of the implementation cost out of its own income.

Till June 1994, the BRDB provided loans worth Tk 153.35 crore to over 13 thousand cooperatives having over three lakh members. The BRDB's rate of loan recovery is about 95 per cent.

The members of the cooperatives under this project have accumulated over Tk 18 crore.

Jatiya Party divided

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to free Ershad and to accept the demand for a caretaker government.

On the other hand Kazi Zafar Ahmed and some other leaders called for negotiations and accepting parole.

The party presidium is likely to discuss the issue at a meeting today. The meeting would also finalise the action programme to be announced from Tuesday's rally at the Panthapath in the city. The JP presidium may also extend its support to the September 10 'Dhaka siege' programme of the Awami League.

The ruling party sources, however, ruled out any possibility of negotiations as the matter is pending before the court.

"Ershad would be tried as per laws of the country. The court will decide his fate," a BNP leader said on condition of anonymity.

Meanwhile, a JP source said that acting party chief Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury, at Wednesday's working committee meeting, took a firm stand against those who questioned his leadership on different occasions.

Chowdhury, at one stage of his speech, offered resignation.

CHT settlers

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cluster villages as long as they live there and employment opportunities for them.

The settlers were concentrated in the cluster villages in 1986 because of violence reported to by Shantibahini.

200 feared drowned

From Page 1 Col 7 night that a rescue team including eight divers had left for Chandpur with necessary equipment yesterday evening.

"We were told that the rescue work could not progress smoothly due to strong current in the river," sources said.

UNB adds: Swapan, an employee of the launch who survived the disaster, told UNB that the launch was carrying about 300 passengers, including more than 100 women and children.

Acting Deputy Commissioner of Chandpur Abdul Momin Chowdhury said the launch was carrying about 400 passengers.

Among those missing were three Ansars personnel — Mohammad Sohrab, Shamsu Miah and Mohammad Razzak — who were on duty on board the launch, river police said.

An Ansar commander travelling by the launch stated that it was carrying 250 maunds of rice from Dhaka to Molla bazar in Shariatpur.

Witnesses said hundreds of people were anxiously waiting on either bank of the turbulent river to know the fate of their relatives travelling by the launch.

Many were sobbing, while

others were trying in vain to trace bodies in the river.

Most of the missing passengers were said to be hailing from Bhederganj of Shariatpur district.

Hasina's shock

UNB adds: Opposition leader Sheikh Hasina today expressed her profound shock at the death of unspecified number of people in the Chandpur launch disaster.

In a statement, she demanded enquiry into the accident and compensation for the victims' families.

The Awami League president strongly criticised the authorities concerned for not executing the Water Vessels Act, leading to frequent launch disasters claiming hundreds of lives every year.

Hasina sent an emergency message to the Chandpur district Awami League asking her party workers to rescue the victims, said a party press release.

She prayed for the departed souls and expressed sympathy for the bereaved families.

The Awami League chief also requested the countymen to offer special prayers for the launch victims on the occasion of Eid-e-Miladunnabi Sunday.

PM reaffirms support to Palestinians

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday reaffirmed Bangladesh's unwavering support and total commitment to the Palestinians in their just cause and realisation of their inalienable rights, reports BSS.

In a message on the occasion of the "Day of Islamic Solidarity with the Palestinian People," to be observed today, the Prime Minister said, "On this day, twenty-five years ago, extensive damage was caused to the holy Al-Aqsa mosque, one of the most sacred places to the Islamic Ummah."

"We," Begum Zia recalled, "had welcomed the accord between the Palestine Liberation Organisation and Israel on the 'declaration of principles' signed in Washington on September 13, 1993 and the subsequent self-rule agreement signed by PLO chairman Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in Cairo on May 4, 1994 as well as the recent declaration signed by the King of Jordan and the Prime Minister of Israel."

"We believe that these accords would lead towards a just, comprehensive and durable settlement in the Middle East and Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories, including the holy Al-Quds Al-Sharif," the Prime Minister said.

The report of the Planning Commission, however, showed that only four ministries had been able to fully spend their allocated fund while seven ministries utilised more than the national average of 94 per cent and 28 ministries spent above 80 per cent of their funds.

The report felt that the ministers should be more active in utilising their funds.

The government had also prioritised some ministries because of the importance of their projects and had reallocated funds to these projects from the low performing ones," Dr Khan said.

These 13 high prioritised ministries were allocated Tk 2211 crore of which they had been able to utilise Tk 2106 crore, that is 95 per cent of their outlay. The report said "as these projects are under high priority, these should be able to meet their target."

Under the 1993-94 ADP, there was a total of 992 projects — 770 investment pro-

jects and 222 technical ones. Of the 161 projects targeted for completion during the year, 136 were implemented successfully. The Economic Relations Division (ERD), Internal Resource Division (IRD) and the Social Welfare Ministry have failed to complete their respective projects.

BSS adds: The National Economic Council (NEC), which met at its auditorium yesterday to review the performances of the overall development programmes of the last financial year expressed satisfaction over the maximum utilisation of fund last year.

The meeting was chaired by the NEC Chairperson and Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia.

Implementation of ADP (% of Total Allocation)

Rate

100
95
90
85
80
75
70

1990-91 1991-92 1992-93 1993-94

Local Currency Foreign Exch Total

Massive crackdown on Kashmiris: 42 killed

SRINAGAR, India, Aug 20: Indian troops launched a massive crackdown on Muslim rebel hideouts in the villages of Kashmir Saturday, killing at least 42 people, most of them suspected guerrillas, news agencies and sources said, reports AP.

Most of the militants killed in the 10 gun battles between troops and separatist guerrillas belonged to the Hizbul Mujahadeen group, which is the most well armed of the 10 militias that are fighting to secede Kashmir from India.

In the fiercest clash at Badgam, 25 kilometers west of Srinagar, troops killed eight guerrillas of the Hizbul Mujahadeen and four civilians were killed in the crossfire, an official said on condition of anonymity.

At Pattan, 30 kilometers north of Srinagar, troops fought rebels for more than

four hours. Eight people were killed in the encounter.

The other encounters took place in villages near Srinagar and one on the highway linking Srinagar to the border town of Baramullah.

Security forces have been fighting guerrillas since the 1989 and more than 9,500 people have been killed in the violence.

But Saturday's death toll was among the highest in months, the average killings being between 15 to 20 people each day.

Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao announced this week that elections to instal a popular government would soon be held in Kashmir. Many militant groups oppose holding elections and have vowed to stop the authorities from preparing for the polls. Kashmir has been under direct federal rule since 1989.

ADP implementation

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vised ADP, while the project aid outlay was Tk 4360 crore, 45 per cent of the total outlay.

The government's contribution to the ADP was also the highest — 36 per cent," the state minister said. Only four years ago, it was only one per cent of the ADP.

The total expenditure of the last fiscal was about Tk 2433 crore or 37 per cent higher than the previous year's expenditure, Dr Khan told the newsmen.

The report of the Planning Commission, however, showed that only four ministries had been able to fully spend their allocated fund while seven ministries utilised more than the national average of 94 per cent and 28 ministries spent above 80 per cent of their funds.

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2 commit suicide, 2 run over by trains in city

By Staff Correspondent

A youngman and a housewife allegedly committed suicide late Friday night while two other persons were run over by trains in the capital yesterday.

Besides, a prisoner allegedly died at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) in the early hours of yesterday, according to police.

Mohammadpur police said Monir Hossain, a 26-year-old drug store employee, allegedly hanged himself to death at the Adabor area, Shaymoli, Friday night.

His body was recovered yesterday from a drug store and sent to the DMCH morgue for autopsy.

In a second incident, a 22-year-old housewife Marjina Begum hanged herself at a house at Nakharpala Friday evening.

Seven women held with Indian sarees

CHITTAGONG, Aug 20: Seven young women were arrested with 259 Indian sarees worth about Taka 61,000 from four coaches here today, police said, reports UNB.

Acting on a tip, a team of the anti-smuggling Task Force halted the Chittagong-bound coaches from Comilla at Madambirhat in Sitakunda thana on Dhaka-Chittagong highway and seized the smuggled sarees from the women.

Maximum 48 sarees were recovered from a woman, who pretended to be pregnant. The arrested — all of them are residents of Comilla district — are: Asia, 41, Firoza, 34, Mohsena, 34, Monwara, 30, Morium, 35, Hadia, 40, and Begum, 30.

Police said these women usually bring smuggled Indian sarees from the bordering areas of Comilla and sell those in different markets of Chittagong.

22 die in Indian boat capsized

NEW DELHI, Aug 20: A boat carrying school children on a river tour capsized, killing 22 people, 14 of them girls between six to 10 years old, news reports said Saturday, reports UNB.

The accident occurred Friday when the boat was trying to negotiate the flooded Chulbandh river in the western state of Maharashtra, about 1,000 kilometers (625 miles) south of New Delhi, Press Trust of India news agency said.

Apart from the students, three women and five men also drowned in the disaster.

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