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# The Daily Star BUSINESS

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## Confidence Cement-truckers row threatens Ctg port operations

'Another impasse likely as shipment's due around Mar 18'

By Inam Ahmed

The continuing row between the Confidence Cement Ltd and truck owners once again threatens the normal operations at Chittagong Port.

The dispute had already cost 26 hours when the trucks went on a wildcat strike in February as the Confidence Cement authorities took initiatives to carry clinkers using its own dumping trucks. The truckers demand that the factory should carry the clinkers through the 'rotation' system rather than carrying the entire load by its own trucks.

The port users now fear that as another clinker shipment is about to arrive at the port around March 18 and both the factory owners and the truckers are adamant on their points, this may lead to yet another impasse.

The crisis cropped up when Confidence imported 21 purpose-built dumping trucks in 1998 as per conditions of the port authorities and the De-

partment of Environment to carry its clinkers. Before this, the company used the trucks supplied by the Truck Owners' Association. But none of these trucks duly complied with the port authorities' and Environment Department's conditions.

Because of the rotation system, each truck had to fall into a line and it needed hundreds of trucks to carry 19,000 tonnes of clinkers. This heavily crowded the Chittagong highway and subsequently the company had to face a police case for causing traffic jam. On the other hand, the trucks, mostly in bad shape, sprayed clinker particles causing air pollution in the locality and resulting in complaints by the local people to the authorities.

The company then calculated that if it carried clinkers using its own trucks, it could save as much as Tk 150 per tonne in transportation costs. While, the factory had to pay Tk 220 per tonne to the truckers, its own trucks cost it only Tk

70. This meant that the company could save Tk nine per bag of cement i.e. Tk three crore a year. "On top of this, we had to pay Tk 50 as 'scaling charge' for weighing the loads. This was taken away from us illegally because the weighing machine is owned by us and placed at our factory," said Confidence Director SM Hasan.

So, the company bought its own dumping trucks and used them for the first time on December 12, 1998. After five days of smooth operation, the truckers blocked the use of the company's own vehicles. Confidence was forced to withdraw its fleet of trucks and it filed a writ petition with the High Court.

After winning the case, the company again tried to use its trucks a year later in December, 1999. A day after, the truckers called a strike and stopped handling other cargoes. However, this did not drag too long. Confidence again faced resis-

tance when its third batch of clinkers arrived on February 19 this year. This time, the truckers were more agitating and kept the port shut for 26 hours. After all negotiations failed, Confidence rolled back its trucks under army guard.

"We are now under extreme stress," said the director, adding "large multinational cement factories are coming and we need to cut our costs to remain in the competition. Unfortunately, we have already become hostage to the whims of the truckers."

Port users also find the dispute between Confidence and the truckers quite disturbing. "Nobody should be obstructed from using his own vehicles to carry his own goods," said Tarek Anis Ahmed, Chairman of the Bangladesh Steamer Agents' Association. "If someone carries his goods quicker, it increases the efficiency of the port and at the same time, helps clear congestion."

AHM Manzoor Alam, Chairman of the Bangladesh Master Stevedores Association, is also of the same view. "We can cut costs by quickly unloading our goods by using our own transports," he said, adding that "overstay of ships means demurrage for us."

However, the Truck Owners' Association is not ready to listen to these arguments. "We have been carrying their goods for the last eight years. We even lent them credits when the financial health of their companies was not good. So, should they discard us now just because they are well off?" asks Zahur Ahmed, President of the association. "If we allow Confidence to carry their own goods, then others will do the same and we will go out of business."

However, the association's view is more of emotional in nature than logic. But as long as the row continues, the port keeps facing operational uncertainties.



Abdul Hai Sarker, Chairman, Board of Directors of Dhaka Bank Limited, delivers inaugural speech at the bank's branch managers' conference held at BRAC Centre for Development Management (BCDM) at Rajendrapur on Saturday. A T M Hayatuzzaman Khan, Vice Chairman, A I M Iftikar Rahman, Managing Director, Md Mokhelesur Rahman, Deputy Managing Director, and A H Anwar Hussain, Company Secretary, are also seen in the picture.

— Dhaka Bank photo

## New BKMEA executive body formed

From A Correspondent

NARAYANGANJ, Mar 11: The new executive body of Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) for the year 2000-2001 was elected yesterday.

Manjurul Haque and A K M Salim Osman have been re-elected President and Vice-President respectively.

The two other vice presidents are Ashraf Uddin Ahmed and Abdus Sobhan Mia. Fazlul Haque has been elected vice-president (finance).

The other newly elected members of the executive committee are Abul Hasnat, Sabbir Alam, M A Salam, Alhaj Habibur Rahman, Haji Ashraf Islam, Haji Shah Alam Sarkar, Abu Ahmed Siddique, Anjon Niogi, Khaza Aljilul Haque, Akram Hossain, Abdul Kadir, Amin Hossain, Mansur Ahmed, Anisur Rahman, Kashem Jamal, Shamim Ahmed, S M Salauddin, Mohammad Hatem, Shafi Rahman, A H Aslam Sani, A K M Jahidul Haque, and Ashfaq Hasan Mahmud.

## SB to open another Sonali Exchange branch in US

In view of growing interest and confidence of the Bangladesh nationals in the United States towards Sonali Exchange Company (SEC), Sonali Bank will open another branch of SEC at Atlanta, a press release of the bank said here yesterday, reports BSS.

Managing Director of Sonali Bank Enamul Huq Chowdhury, also the chairman of the Board of Directors of SEC, attended a recent meeting in New York and reviewed the activities and overall business viability of SEC in the United States.

On return home yesterday, Chowdhury commented that the Bangladesh nationals in the United States would extend their more cooperation to the SEC provided the service could be improved up to their satisfaction. A total of Tk 1,036 crore by way of 72,672 remittances were sent to Bangladesh through the SEC in 1999, the press release said.

## Al Maha's new interactive web site

Visitors can now enjoy a virtual tour of Dubai's seven-star Al Maha Desert Resort when they click to the new interactive web site. HYPERLINK <http://www.al-maha.com> www.al-maha.com, says a press release.

Live this month, the new look web site allows Web visitors a more vivid, virtual experience of the world's first ever desert ecotourism resort.

www.al-maha.com incorporates the latest technology in design such as flash animation and QuickTime VR. To retain the traditional and naturalistic elements of Al Maha, hand-drawn icons and organic textures taken from hand made papers are used for the interface.

The main changes include a section for a virtual tour of Al Maha, a photo gallery with facilities to download a short video and reservations online. The Al Maha Desert Resort, owned and managed by Emirates Airline, is located on 25 square kilometres of nature reserve. There are 30 luxurious suites, each with a private swimming pool, offering guests superb seven-star comfort in the heart of the Dubai desert.



Sabbir A Agha, Managing Director of Kai Bangladesh Aluminium, looks at his company's products along with distributors and fabricators at the Sales Conference '99 held in the city on Saturday.

## Final decision on pvt container terminal yet to be taken

A meeting of the parliamentary standing committee on Shipping Ministry yesterday said the final decision is yet to be taken on signing treaty for setting up container terminal in private sector at Chittagong, reports BSS.

The parliamentary committee would be informed before taking any decision on the proposed container terminal, said the meeting held at Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban with the committee Chairman Col (Retd) Shaukat Ali in the chair.

The meeting discussed overall activities of Mongla port and placed some recommendations to resolve the problems regarding proper operation of the port.

It also mentioned the neces-

sity of more amendments to the Inland Shipping Ordinance, 1976 for surveying and registration of water vehicles.

The meeting also discussed the activities of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority especially collection of dredger for maintaining navigability and lease out ghats.

The meeting emphasised the need for improving the service to passengers and discussed the issue of purchasing crane for Chittagong port.

The committee members Deputy Minister for Food Dhirendra Debnath Shambhu, ABM Abul Quasem, Mir Shakawat Ali (Daru), Mahmuda Saogat, Giasuddin Kader Chowdhury and Jafrul Islam Chowdhury attended the meeting.

## Kai Bangladesh Aluminium holds sales confce

Star Business Report

Kai Bangladesh Aluminium held its Sales Conference '99 in the city on Saturday, says a press release.

About 400 distributors and fabricators took part in the celebration.

Speaking on the occasion, Managing Director of the company, Sabbir A Agha, dwelt upon the success of the company during the year 1999.

He congratulated all the distributors and the employees for their hard work and encouraged them to do more for the current year.

He said Kai Bangladesh Aluminium has significantly added value to the economy. Import was slashed by 45 to 50 per cent in the first year of its production and this year the company will target of cut another 25 per cent of the total foreign imports.

## Dhaka Bank holds managers' confce

The Branch Managers' conference-2000 of Dhaka Bank Limited was held at BRAC Centre for Development Management (BCDM) at Rajendrapur on Saturday, says a press release.

The conference was inaugurated by Abdul Hai Sarker, Chairman, Board of Directors of the bank. A T M Hayatuzzaman Khan, Vice Chairman, was present.

A I M Iftikar Rahman, Managing Director, Md Mokhelesur Rahman, Deputy Managing Director, and other senior executives of head office, branch managers and second officers of the branches were also present.

Speaking on the occasion, the Chairman expressed satisfaction over the profit earnings of the bank.

He urged the officials to render quality service to the clients and create new products.

## Zia Fertiliser Co suspends production

Zia Fertiliser Company Ltd. under BCIC yesterday temporarily suspended its normal production due to sudden mechanical fault, says a press release.

Meanwhile necessary repairing works have been undertaken by the factory's own technicians and engineers. It is expected that the normal production will be restored soon.

Presently, the factory godown has a stock of 12,000 MT urea fertiliser. Moreover, there is sufficient stock in the buffer godowns.

There will, however, be no crisis in the distribution of urea fertiliser to the dealers under its command area.

## CDC's pre-tax profit stands at 79.9m pounds in '99

Star Business Report

The CDC Group Plc made a pre-tax profit of 79.9 million pounds in 1999, up from a loss of 28.2 million pounds of the previous year, the company's preliminary results for last year shows, says a CDC press release issued yesterday.

The recovery from the 1998 slump was due primarily to a more favourable economic climate within the company's operating markets.

New investments of the company stood at 279 million during the year, which was 227 million in 1998. Its total portfolio till December 31, 1999, was valued at 1.3 billion pounds with 40 per cent of it in equity investment. This is up from 32 per cent of the previous year.

The Group passed the CDC Act and became a public limited company. It has also established a joint venture with CGU to invest in China.

Commenting on the results, Alan Gillespie, CDC's recently-appointed chief executive, said: "Looking back over 1999, I would describe CDC's year as one of success and achievement. The year saw positive results delivered in terms of new investments and exits, and considerable change to the organisation in terms of structure at strategy."

"We continue to make excellent progress in refocusing our business towards making equity and equity-related investments. In 1999, 47 per cent of our new investments were made in equity. We firmly believe that by doing this we can achieve competitive returns for our future shareholders," he added.

## Aptech seminar held in city Computer programmers urged to reap highest Internet benefit

By Staff Correspondent

Experts at a seminar in the city yesterday urged the computer programmers of the country to gain expertise in complex Internet-enabled software system.

They also called upon them to exploit the maximum advantage of Internet and work in tandem with foreign organisations for learning the best information technology practices and transfers.

Zeeshan Rahman Khan, a computer science graduate from MIT, Boston, and former software engineer of Oracle Corporation Inc., presented a keynote paper at the seminar titled "Career Seminar for Software Engineering of the 21st Century".

APTECH Computer Education which has been operating in Bangladesh since 1997 organised the seminar at BIAM auditorium in the city.

Zeeshan Rahman, who is also the Chief Software Architect of e-school Net Inc. of USA,

said that personal and group productivity have increased a lot due to the advancement of IT education in the country. "As a result of technology, people across the world are now getting their jobs done faster."

During his two-hour discussion on software, he advised the computer-literate youths of the country to develop new software.

President of Bangladesh Computer Society Abdullah H Kafi spoke on the occasion as the special guest while Executive Director of Axiom Technology Ltd Rezwan Bin Faruk gave the welcome speech.

Managing Director of Techno Vista Ltd and Editor of PC Quest Bangladesh T I M Nurul Kabir spoke on the status of information technology (IT) in Bangladesh and the prospect of IT career, while Manager of HR and Corporate Affairs, Nestle Bangladesh Ltd, M Zulfiqar Hossain, spoke on human resource development.

## Rupali Bank's deposit up by Tk 321.86 cr in 1998

Star Business Report

The deposit of Rupali Bank Limited stood at Tk 3521.78 crore during the year 1998.

This was revealed by the bank while reviewing the annual report at its 13th annual general meeting held at BCIC auditorium in the city on Saturday, says a press release.

Chairman of the bank, Afzalur Rahman, presided over the meeting.

The meeting was told that the bank's deposit marked an increase of Tk 321.86 crore over the previous year.

The bank continued to extend its credit facilities during the year to the productive and priority sectors including industry, agriculture, trade, commerce with a view to boosting the economic activities of the country.

The total loans and advances of the bank during the year under review stood at Tk 2150.20 crore compared to Tk 2030.04 crore during 1997, representing 5.91 per cent increase over the previous year.



Afzalur Rahman, Chairman of Rupali Bank Limited, addresses the bank's 13th annual general meeting at BCIC auditorium in the city on Saturday.

— Rupali Bank photo

## BA to offer top job to US Airways chairman

LONDON, Mar 12: British Airways is believed to have offered the chief executive's job to US Airways chairman Stephen Wolf. The Sunday Times reported, reports AP.

BA called Wolf "almost immediately" after BA's former top executive Bob Ayling announced his surprise resignation after four troubled years as head of Britain's largest airline, the newspaper said.

If appointed, Wolf would become the first US boss in the airline's history. BA refused to comment on the story or the airline's hunt for a new chief executive.

"Certainly that is premature speculation at this point," said spokeswoman Camilla Wrey. "We've had no confirmation about who has been approached, let alone that anyone has been approached."

The Sunday Times said Sir Michael Angus, BA's deputy chairman and the chairman of its nominations committee, phoned Wolf on Friday to ask him if he would be interested in the position.

During the phone call, the men agreed to an "amicable solution" to a four-year-legal wrangle between the two airlines, the newspaper said, quoting an unnamed BA executive.

US Airways was suing BA in New York for allegedly breaking a contractual agreement dating back to the mid-1990s.

"It is no coincidence that we settled our legal problems with US Airways the day Bob (Ayling) found out his fate," The Sunday Times said, quoting the executive.

Wrey confirmed that a legal battle between BA and US Airways had been resolved, but said the agreement was made several days before Ayling announced his departure.

Wolf is one of the highest paid airline executives in the United States, reportedly earning \$34.2 million in 1998 as chairman of US Airways. He is also a well-known airline industry troubleshooter and widely credited with putting United Airlines and Air France back on track, The Sunday Times said.

British Airways announced Friday that chairman Lord Colin Marshall would take over the chief executive job while the airline searched for a successor to 54-year-old Ayling.

The inflation rate stood at 5.59 per cent in the corresponding week of last year.

## Inflation surges to 2.14 pc in India

NEW DELHI, Mar 12: India's inflation rate recorded a marginal increase of 0.6 per cent to 2.14 per cent for the week that ended on February 26, 2000, despite a perceptible decline in the overall price index, report's Xinhua.

According to the Reserve Bank of India, the 0.6 per cent point increase in the annual rate of inflation to 2.14 per cent from 2.08 per cent in the previous week was in contrast with the falling trends witnessed in all the major categories of Wholesale Price Index.