

Chittagong port users protest additional fees

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Chittagong

Importers yesterday alleged that operators, shipping agents and freight forwarders are extorting additional fees from them during delivery of containers at the Chittagong Port.

The importers at a meeting in the port city objected to the "illegal charges", and the situation prompted business leaders to form a monitoring cell with representatives of all stakeholders to solve the issue.

The Port Users Forum, a platform of Chittagong Port's stakeholders, organised the meeting with its Chairman Mahbubul Alam in the chair.

Alam blamed freight forwarders for collecting additional charges such as delivery order charge and destination service charge, violating directions from the National Board of Revenue.

Besides, different shipping agents and main line operators are collecting varying rates of documentation fees, cleaning fees and administrative fees, which should be uniform, said Alam, also the president of Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

However, slapping documentation fees here is illogical since importers already pay those at the port of origin, said Nasir Uddin Ahmed Chowdhury, first vice president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

The shipping agents are randomly charging importers for cleaning services, even though not all containers carry perishables, said Quazi Mahmud Imam Bilu, first joint general secretary of Chittagong Customs Clearing and Forwarding Agents Association.

He also blamed shipping agents for taking illogical repairing charges against almost 70 percent of the import containers that are directly delivered from Chittagong Port.

MA Latif, a member of the parliamentary standing committee on shipping, called for discussions to sort out the long-running problem.

SME Foundation stresses easy loans for entrepreneurs



STAR
KM Habib Ullah, chairperson of SME Foundation, and Syed Md Ihsanul Karim, managing director of the foundation, attend the ninth annual general meeting of the agency at The Daily Star Centre yesterday.

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

SME Foundation yesterday called for bringing quick solution to the problem faced by the entrepreneurs in accessing credit from the banking system.

The government agency promoting small and medium enterprises made the appeal at its ninth annual general meeting at The Daily Star Centre in the capital.

During the meeting presided over by its chairperson KM Habib

Ullah, the board members instructed the foundation to expand its activities for the development of the SME sector.

SMEs occupy an important position in the national economy. They account for about 45 percent of manufacturing value addition, about 80 percent of industrial employment, about 90 percent of total industrial units and about 25 percent of the labour force.

Their total contribution to export

earnings varies from 75 percent to 80 percent.

But despite huge development in the sector in the last five years, SMEs, particularly the small ones, face difficulties in getting loans from the banking sector.

The board of the foundation also approved the annual report and the audit report of 2013-14, the foundation said in a statement. SME Foundation Managing Director Syed Md Ihsanul Karim also spoke.

High official of State Bank of India in town

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Mrutyunjay Mahapatra, chief general manager of the International Banking Group of the State Bank of India, will arrive in Dhaka for a three-day visit today.

During his stay, Mahapatra will review the bank's operations in Bangladesh and meet its clients, the bank said in a statement yesterday.

He will also meet top officials of Bangladesh Bank and other important institutions.



Blackberry posts profit for fourth quarter

BBC NEWS

Canadian mobile phone firm Blackberry has posted better-than-expected fourth-quarter earnings, but its revenues showed a larger-than-expected drop.

It reported net profit of \$28m (£18.8m), against a loss of \$148m a year earlier.

It was the second quarter running the company had posted a surprise profit.

However, revenue slid to \$660m from \$793m, below analysts' expectations. For the year, Blackberry reported that its loss had narrowed to \$304m.

"Our focus this past year was on getting our financial house in order while creating a multi-year growth strategy and investing in our product portfolio. We now have a very good handle on our margins and our product roadmaps have been well received," chief executive John Chen said in a statement.



NBL
Shamsul Huda Khan, managing director of National Bank, and Md Iftikhar-Uz-Zaman, deputy managing director of Investment Corporation of Bangladesh, sign a deal at a programme in Dhaka recently to provide stockmarket's small investors with loans under a special scheme.

Budget to be cut after slow spending

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Finance Minister AMA Muhith will sit with the fiscal coordination council in the first week of April, during which a decision will be taken on the amount to be reduced from the budget, said the official.

Around Tk 15,000 crore may be slashed from the revised budget estimate, he said.

Due to the messy political situation, GDP growth forecast will also be revised down to around 6.9 percent from the original 7.3 percent.

"Taking the overall situation into consideration, a slight change may be brought to the 7.3 percent projection for GDP growth," Muhith said in parliament early this month.



QATAR AIRWAYS
Rashed Khan Menon, civil aviation and tourism minister, and Ihab Sorial, vice president of Qatar Airways for Indian sub-continent, attend the opening of new sales, reservations and ticketing office of the airline in Dhaka on Tuesday.

Tourist spending to rise 6pc this year

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Both foreign and domestic tourists are afraid of moving around due to the nonstop blockade that has not only brought losses to tour operators but also deprived local impoverished people around the sites of their livelihoods. When tourists move from one site to another, they spend money for food, transport, accommodation and souvenirs, boosting the local economy.

But nonstop countryside strikes, invariably associated with violence, have forced the tourists to stay inside their hotels.

Travel and tourism contributed Tk 29,660 crore, or 1.9 percent, to the country's gross domestic product last year.

This year, it is forecasted to put in Tk 33,310 crore, up 5.9 percent.

The direct contribution of travel and tourism to GDP reflects the 'internal' spending within a particular country by residents and non-residents for business and leisure purposes. This also includes the government's spending directly linked to visitors, such as museums or national parks.

The WTTC has been conducting economic impact research for more than 21 years now to assess and quantify the value of travel and tourism's contribution to GDP and employment. The study said travel and tourism investment in Bangladesh was Tk 6,090 crore in 2014, or 1.4 percent of the total investment.

It predicted that the country will attract 463,000 international tourist arrivals this year.

Travel and tourism also generated

903,500 jobs directly in 2014 (1.6 percent of total employment) in the country and is forecasted to grow 2.1 percent this year.

This includes employment by hotels, travel agents, airlines and other passenger transportation services (excluding commuter services).

It also includes, for example, the activities of the restaurants and leisure industries directly supported by tourists.

Domestic travel spending in Bangladesh generated 97.9 percent of direct travel and tourism GDP in 2014 compared with 2.1 percent for visitor exports (for example foreign visitor spending or international tourism receipts).

Visitor exports -- spending within the country by international tourists for both business and leisure trips -- are a key component of the direct contribution of travel and tourism.

In 2014, Bangladesh generated Tk 1,020 crore in visitor exports and the amount may rise to Tk 1,060 crore this year.

Together with its research partner Oxford Economics, WTTC produces comprehensive reports on an annual basis to quantify, compare and forecast the economic impact of travel and tourism on more than 180 economies around the world.

It also publishes a world report highlighting global trends, as well as reports on regions, sub-regions and economic and geographic groups.

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Sweden to raise petrol tax as price falls

AFP, Stockholm

Sweden's left-wing government proposed Friday a hike in petrol taxes, citing the drop in oil prices and pressure put on it by its coalition partner the Greens.

"The oil price has plunged by 50 percent, so it's become cheaper to fill up at the pump. That's one thing. The other is that we are in a government with the Green Party," Social Democratic Finance Minister Magdalena Andersson told reporters at a press conference.

"We need to finance our reforms krona for krona. And that means we need to increase revenues," she said.

The government proposed to increase the tax on petrol by 0.44 kronor (4.7 euro cents, \$0.05) per litre and on diesel by 0.48 kronor.

The hike, which would take effect on January 1, would bring in 4.1 billion kronor (440 million euros, \$479 million) to state coffers in 2016.

The proposal is part of the government's spring budget bill to be presented to parliament in April.

It is however uncertain whether the measure will be adopted, given that the government represents a minority in the assembly and depends on the opposition's support or abstention.

The head of the main opposition party, the conservative Moderates, Anna Kinberg Batra, has already expressed opposition to the plan.

"Government proposes heavy tax hikes for households, transport and business -- how does that make Sweden stronger or create jobs?," she tweeted.

The previous centre-right government had in 2009 said it wanted Sweden's car fleet to be entirely fossil fuel-free by 2030.

Qatar Airways moves to new Dhaka office

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Qatar Airways has opened its new sales, reservations and ticketing office in Dhaka on Tuesday, the airlines said in statement yesterday.

The office is upgraded to a larger and purpose built space of nearly 5,000 square feet at SPL Western Tower in the city's Tejgaon industrial area, according to the statement.

Ihab Sorial, vice president of Qatar

Airways for Indian sub-continent, and Rashed Khan Menon, civil aviation and tourism minister, attended the opening ceremony of the new space.

"This is a one-stop sales, reservations and ticketing office at the most prestigious business centre in Dhaka. With the new facility, we are taking a large step closer to our growing number of passengers and providing them with the strengths of our global network," Sorial said.

Brazil stagnates in 2014, recession looms for 2015

AFP, Rio De Janeiro

The Brazilian economy, the world's seventh-largest, posted near-stagnant growth in 2014, expanding just 0.1 percent, and will likely enter recession this year, officials said Friday.

Hosting the World Cup in June and July and gearing up for the Olympics next year failed to reverse the drag of rising inflation, a ballooning deficit and a \$4-billion kickbacks scandal at state oil giant Petrobras that has tarnished Brazil's largest company and President Dilma Rousseff's party.

It was the fourth year of lackluster growth for the South American giant, whose economy expanded 2.7 percent in 2013, 1.8 percent in 2012 and 3.9 percent in 2011, under a revised calculation system that took

effect this month. Rousseff has never managed to match the blistering 7.6-percent GDP growth Brazil posted in 2010, the last year in office of her charismatic predecessor and mentor, Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. The central bank is expecting an even worse year in 2015, forecasting a contraction of 0.5 percent.

"Looking forward, the questions are how deep will the recession be in 2015, when will Brazil start to recover and how fast," said Robert Wood, Brazil analyst at the Economist Intelligence Unit.

Analyst Alex Agostini, chief economist at Brazilian firm Austin Rating, predicted modest growth of around one to two percent in 2016 before a return to stronger growth of about 2.5 percent in 2017.



AMBER GROUP
MA Hashem, chairman of Amber Group, inaugurates the company's second fashion outlet in sector 9 of Uttara, Dhaka on Thursday. Showkat Aziz, managing director, was also present.

BB's new effort to help women entrepreneurs

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The directive has made access to finance much easier for thousands of women entrepreneurs, he added.

The central bank has also taken special policy measures and opened refinancing windows to facilitate the women empowerment in various sectors.

"Women's empowerment will help achieve balanced and gender-friendly economic growth in Bangladesh," Rahman said.

"If we are able to sustain progress in women's empowerment, we will be recognised by the whole world," he added.

The Alliance for Financial Inclusion (AFI) has also awarded the BB for its policy contribution towards reaching out to the masses with mobile financial services, Rahman added.

About 1,000 women entrepreneurs, senior officials and executives of commercial banks participated in the conference.



SBAC
SM Amzad Hossain, chairman of South Bangla Agriculture and Commerce Bank, attends the bank's second annual general meeting at its head office in Dhaka recently. Md Rafiqul Islam, managing director, was also present.