

Truckers forced to pay illegal toll at land port

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

A section of influential business leaders, politicians and workers' leaders are illegally collecting toll from goods-laden trucks coming from India and Nepal at Banglabandha land port in Panchagarh.

In the name of a development fund of the Panchagarh Exporter-Importer Association, the group has been realising 100 Indian rupees as toll from each goods-laden truck coming from the two neighbouring countries, since the inauguration of the immigration service at the port in February this year.

The association had stopped collecting the toll on September 1 because of an internal feud.

But a day later, a section of people resumed toll collection in the name of poverty reduction in the union council and port labourers' welfare.

During a recent visit to the port, it was found that some labour leaders were collecting toll from goods-laden trucks.

Several Indian truck drivers alleged that they have to pay the money for each trip to Bangladesh, as truck drivers

are not given unloading serial numbers if they refuse to give the money.

Babul Hossain, secretary of Banglabandha Union Parishad, said over 200 goods-laden trucks come to the port from India and Nepal each working day.

He said the exporters and importers association and Banglabandha Union Parishad take a portion of the amount, after giving 10 percent to the Coolie Workers Union.

Mehedi Hasan Khan Babla, president of the association, said the toll is collected for the development of the business community.

The association has collected Tk 10 lakh since February. Of the amount, Tk 6 lakh was spent on different welfare activities and iftar programmes. The rest Tk 4 lakh remains deposited with the association, he added.

However, Mojaffar Hossain, treasurer of the association, said he does not maintain any account on the collection of toll.

"I have been protesting toll collection from goods-laden trucks from the very beginning."

Rajab Ali, assistant general manger

of the port, said he was threatened when he asked the toll collectors not to charge the trucks.

Kudrat-e-Khuda, chairman of Banglabandha Union Parishad, said he knows nothing about the people who are collecting the toll.

To offset the additional cost, Indian businessmen have increased the price of their goods, particularly that of stone, which is affecting the importers. Businesspeople said the Banglabandha-Phulbari land port has more potential than Benapole-Petrapole, as it is close to Siliguri, the gateway to northeast India, Nepal and Bhutan.

From Banglabandha, West Bengal's major commercial city Siliguri is just eight kilometres away, Nepal's Kakorvita about 58 km, the border of Bhutan about 130 km, and Nathula of China 200 km.

If illegal charges are levied on trucks, importers and exporters using the port would feel discouraged, they added.

Tofiqul Islam, vice-president of the association, said businessmen are against collecting toll from the trucks.



Humaira Azam, president and managing director (current charge) of Bank Asia, poses with the participants of the 39th foundation training course for 27 officers of the bank, at Bank Asia Institute for Training and Development in Dhaka on Sunday.

GE to supply gas turbine to Ghorashal power plant

STAR BUSINESS DESK

GE has been awarded a contract by China Energy Engineering Group -Guangdong Power Engineering Co Ltd to supply gas turbine for repowering unit 4 of Ghorashal power plant at Narsingdi.

In line with the government's power generation expansion plans to add around 12 GW electricity by 2018, the repowering of the plant of Bangladesh Power Development Board is an important milestone, GE said in a statement yesterday.

The plant will result in an addition of more than 200 MW of clean energy output and an efficiency increase of more than 20 percent, according to the statement.

The repowering of unit 4 will result in an addition of more than 400 MW of clean energy to the national grid of Bangladesh, GE said.

The existing gas-fired boiler of unit 4 at Ghorashal plant will be substituted with GE's advanced 9E.03 AGP gas turbine with advanced gas path (AGP) technology, including advisory services for installation, performance testing and two years of operational spares during warranty period.

The repowering will add 25 years to the overall lifetime of the power plant, increase its efficiency from the existing 31 percent to more than 53 percent and improve the overall output of the plant to 409MW, from the current 170MW.

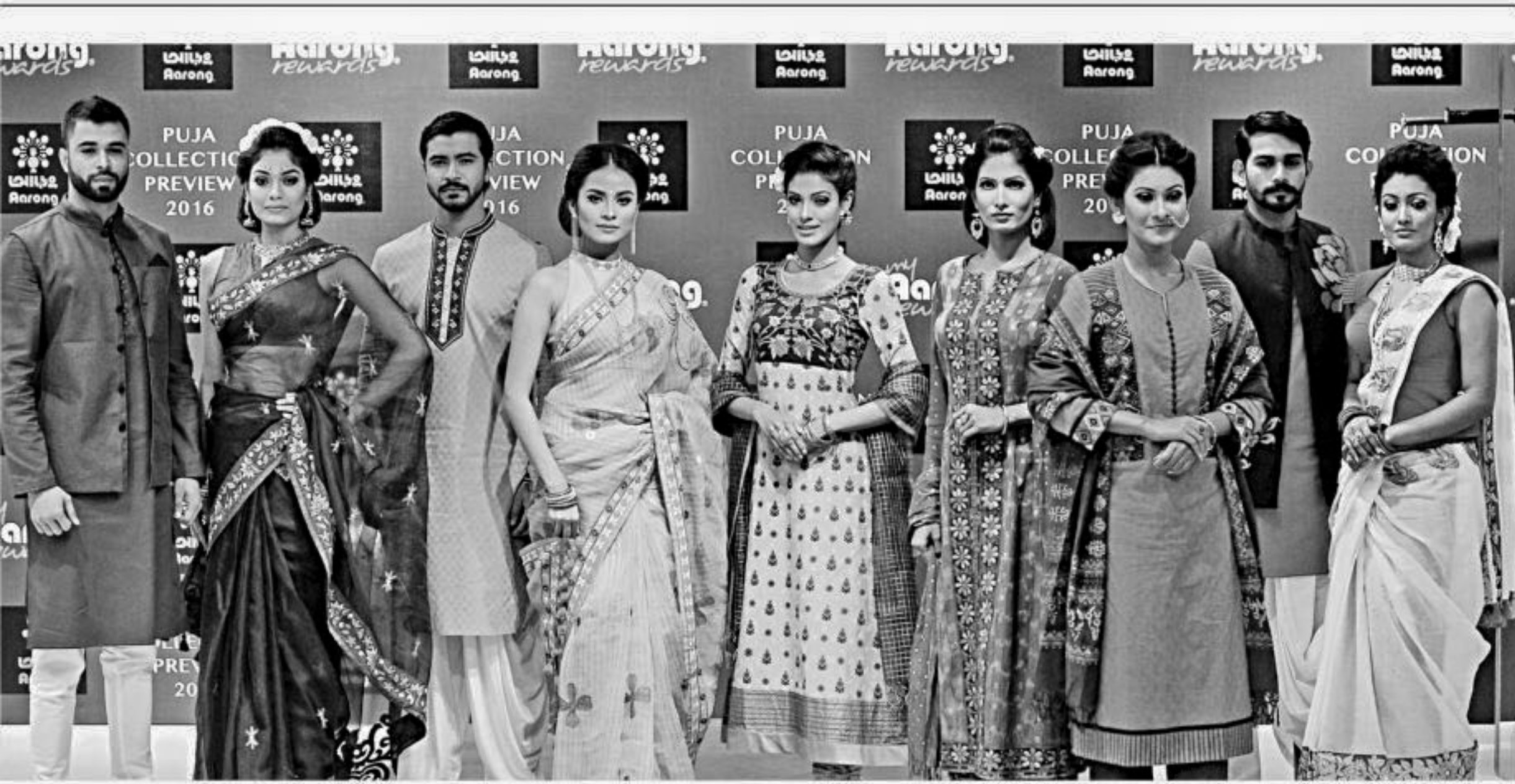
"The power sector in Bangladesh is

on the rise and we are upbeat about the opportunities it presents," said Deepesh Nanda, CEO of gas power systems at GE South Asia.

"As one of the world's largest suppliers of gas turbines, our latest advanced products are at the heart of world's most efficient power plants," Nanda said.

"We are committed to supporting the government in its endeavour to bring efficient and reliable power for the people of Bangladesh through our extensive portfolio of technology and solutions."

GE is a power generation pioneer with more than 60 years in gas turbine technology and manufacturing. Approximately one third of the world's installed power base includes GE equipment.



Models pose at the launch of Puja 2016 collection of Aarong, at its Wari outlet on Saturday.

Mastercard starts biometric payments

AFP, Paris

Shoppers in a dozen European countries can make online payments using a selfie from Tuesday, under a rollout by Mastercard of new payment technology.

Removing the need to memorise a password, Mastercard said biometrics like fingerprints or facial recognition could now be used to verify a customer's identity.

The technology, unveiled at the

Mobile World Congress in Barcelona in February, has been tested in the Netherlands, US and Canada, the credit card company said.

It is now available in 12 European countries before being rolled out across the world gradually next year.

"Mastercard Identity Check Mobile eliminates the need for cardholders to recall passwords, dramatically speeding up the digital checkout experience while also improving security,"

Mastercard said in a statement.

"Instead, the cardholder can verify their identity by using the fingerprint scanner on their smartphone or via facial recognition technology by taking a 'selfie' photo."

The 12 markets where the technology is now available are Austria, Belgium, Britain, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, and Sweden.

Garment sector needs tripartite council to solve disputes: analysts

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Srinivas Reddy, country director of International Labour Organisation, termed the concept a great initiative. He said the tripartite mechanism is one of the core values of society and the ILO as well.

He said regular dialogue is important, instead of sitting for a dialogue when a crisis arrives. Mikail Shipar, labour secretary, said disputes cannot be resolved and confidence cannot be built without social dialogue.

"I am convinced that there should be a permanent tripartite consultative council for the garments sector in order to take the immensely potential sector forward."

The secretary urged the BILS to propose a framework for the committee to help the government examine the issue. "We can't change the laws overnight. But we have regulations at our disposal where we can bring in changes."

Both Reddy and Shipar said the planned council for the garment sector must be linked to the existing national Tripartite Consultative Council. "Otherwise, it will be a farce," added Shipar.

Faruque Hassan, senior vice president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, said the relations between factory owners and workers have improved over the years, even if it has not reached its expected level.

Labour leader Babul Akter said the leaders to be picked for the planned consultative committee must come from the garments sector. "Likewise, factory owners

who will be chosen should be from compliant factories." Shamima Nasrin, another labour leader, said there should be adequate representation of women as most garment workers are female.

Eckhard Wilhelm Heine, head of the development cooperation of the German embassy in Dhaka, said a tripartite mechanism can yield great things. "So, let's continue our efforts so we can reach a permanent tripartite mechanism."

Sten Petersen, country director of 3F, Denmark's largest trade union, said a tripartite body cannot work effectively without a clear legal mandate.

He said 90 percent of cases at the labour courts in Bangladesh can be solved at the sectoral and factory level.

Khondaker Golam Moazzem, additional research director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said a number of forums and committees have been formed in the country but they have worked reactively instead of proactively.

"As a result, we did not achieve desired results. We hope the labour ministry will keep this in mind while formulating the tripartite mechanism."

Alonzo Suson, country programme director of Solidarity Centre; Md Anwar Hossain, joint convener of Sramik Karmochari Oikya Parishad, a platform of workers and employees; Sukkur Mahmood, BILS vice chairman; Md Zafrul Hasan, joint secretary general, and Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmed, executive director, also spoke.

Telcos should have active participation in MFS

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In Bangladesh, MFS services are being run by the banks. So far, there are around 3.66 crore active accounts with monthly transaction values increasing at 7 to 8 percent.

Regulators in Afghanistan and Nepal said they are going through a bank-led model, but are ensuring active participation of the telecom regulators.

Afghanistan Telecom Regulatory Authority's Chairman Mohammad Najeeb Azizi said the voice business is dying and that is why the mobile operators will have to redesign their business models.

Mobile operators will have to play with data and here, MFS can be a part of their service, Azizi added.

Azizi said regulators have to protect the interests of investors and for doing that "we have to help them create new window for digital business like MFS."

Earlier in the opening session, Bangladesh's Law Minister Anisul Huq said regulators should find a common framework of MFS for the entire region.

"I want to request the members of this forum to interconnect mobile financial services within the region, hence promoting trade and commerce among the people of the region."

Considering the socio-economic condition and general literacy rate, it may not be commercially feasible for the banks to deliver the financial services to the remot-

est corner of the country, he said.

Here, the mobile industry can play a significant role, utilising the infrastructure they have deployed over a few decades, he added.

MFS is considered one of the revolutionary inventions in terms of economic inclusion around the world, the minister said.

"In today's world, financial inclusion is a key to social inclusion and it is necessary to foster inclusive growth and combat poverty. That is why 'digital financial inclusion' remains as one of the core elements of a 'Digital Bangladesh' vision."

State Minister for Foreign Affairs Mohammed Shahrir Alam said the Bangladesh government has invested heavily in ICT to develop quality human resources.

BTRC Chairman Shahjahan Mahmood said, in the last seven years, the country saw tremendous development in digitisation.

By this time, internet penetration reached around 40 percent from 5 percent in 2009 and mobile penetration crossed 80 percent.

After the opening session, Mahmood was elected the new chairman of SARTIC and he will hold this position till the next SARTIC summit.

Another 90 foreign and local experts are taking part in the council meetings that will conclude tomorrow.

Panel formed to set weight limits for trucks on highways

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The strike created a huge congestion in goods transportation at the sea port. After four days, the strike was suspended until yesterday.

Khaled Iqbal, chairman of the Chittagong Port Authority, told the meeting that about 39,000 twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs) of containers were stockpiled at the port yards against the storage capacity of 35,000 TEUs of containers.

Garment exporters account for 80 percent of the Chittagong Port's usage, meaning they use the Dhaka-Chittagong highway by the same percentage, said Siddiqur Rahman, president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters' Association. "But the government took the decision to impose fine on overweight vehicles without consulting us."

The decision has caused them to incur huge losses as they could not make timely shipments. "Now, we have to ship those goods via costly air cargo. Otherwise, the buyers will go for mark-down or even cancel the orders," he added. Shaful Islam, first vice-president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, also echoed the same.

"Being major users of port and roads, we were not informed of such big government decisions," he added.

Earlier, Shamsul Haque of the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology presented a paper on the load control on behalf of the roads and highways division at the meeting. Presenting comparative data of India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Malaysia on loading control, Haque said India and Pakistan allow more weight on their vehicles.

An empty carrier, be it truck, covered van or prime mover, weighs around 11 tonnes. So, a six-wheeler truck becomes 16 tonnes with just five tonnes of goods. "We can add additional axle to load more goods in the carriers," he added.

New passenger coaches for railway

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Considering the two factors, the government has decided to buy 1,120 metre gauge and broad gauge coaches. The coaches will be collected in phases due to financial constraints, said a planning ministry official. Another project that got the approval at the meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council chaired by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was for setting up a medical college in Patuakhali.

The total cost would be Tk 584 crore, of which Tk 268 crore will come from the \$2 billion Indian line of credit.

The government is targeting to get the medical college up and running by 2023. The Ecnc also gave the green light to a Tk 316 crore project for elevating the Shyamganj-Jaria-Birishiri-Durgapur district road in Netrokona to a national highway for connecting the Birishiri and Bijoypur land ports, where ceramics, red sand and coal arrive.

Besides, Birishiri, Durgapur and Kamlakanda are indigenous localities and hence tourist spots but the roads leading to them are in a very bad shape, said the proposal.

Apart from this, the Ecnc also gave the nod to a project to construct a 20-storey building for judicial officials at Azimpur in the capital for Tk 96 crore.

The building No. 43 and 44 of Azimpur Government Staff Colony will be demolished and the new building will be constructed on the site. The building will have 114 flats.

The total cost of the eight projects approved yesterday is Tk 3,488 crore, of which Tk 2,028 crore will be donor fund.

Inflation creeps up in Sep

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Although the liquidity growth targets in the current monetary policy are not as expansionary as in fiscal 2010-11, they are on the high side, the lender said.

The evidence suggests that the higher growth of liquidity is unlikely to help private investment or gross domestic product growth but may simply feed into inflation.

The monetary policy does not adequately address existing inflationary pressures and the continued appreciation of the real exchange rate.

"With global inflation slowing dramatically to the 2-3 percent range, Bangladesh needs to reduce domestic inflation through firmer fiscal and monetary policies."

It is not advisable to target inflation at 5.8 percent when all the external competitors and export markets have much lower

inflation, the report said.

Besides, the scope for expansionary fiscal and monetary policies in Bangladesh remains limited because of binding structural constraints on the supply side.

In an environment of binding structural constraints, rising risks and limited policy buffers, growth-sustaining structural policies are urgently needed.

"If well targeted, they could also support short-term aggregate demand. Easing inflation pressures have allowed the BB to cut policy rates and maintain their accommodative policy stance."

Since the drop in international commodity prices is responsible for only part of the decline in inflation, further policy easing is not warranted in view of rising core inflation and uptick of credit growth, the WB said.



Kazi Md Safayet Kabir, senior vice president of NRBC Bank, and Aktar Hussain, chairman of Rangs Electronics Ltd (Sony Rangs), attend the signing of a deal at a programme. The bank's credit card holders will enjoy interest free 3, 6 or 12 monthly instalments for payments during their purchase of goods from Rangs Electronics.