

Apparel factories grind to a halt for gas crisis

Titas says it will take two to three weeks to repair pipeline

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Production at hundreds of textile and garment factories in Konabari and Gazipur industrial areas has been hampered for the last one week due to the suspension of gas transmission for a leak in the pipeline at Elega in Tangail district.

Exporters said they will face difficulties to ship their products in time and might have to resort to expensive air shipments to meet the deadline.

They might have to offer discounts too if they miss the deadline. Factories at Konabari, Shafipur, Rajendrapur, Kashimpur, Mouchak, Mirzapur, Gazipur, Ashulia, Savar and Kaliakoir areas are the worst affected, said industry insiders.

More than 1,200 textile and garment factories have either suspended production or are running with electricity, said Siddiqur Rahman, president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, the garment makers' platform.

"We met the prime minister on

AT A GLANCE

A leak caused the closure of a pipeline in Tangail last week

More than 1,200 textile and garment factories were affected: BGMEA

Affected areas: Konabari, Shafipur, Rajendrapur, Kashimpur, Mouchak, Mirzapur, Gazipur, Ashulia, Savar and Kaliakoir

BGMEA leaders expressed concern to prime minister and energy minister on Monday

Owners fear shipments will be delayed

Monday to express our concern. We also expressed our concern to the energy minister as the factory owners have been suffering for the last one week.

There are about 400 composite mills in those areas, according to Rahman.

"We want an immediate solution - as the owners will face difficulties in the timely shipment of goods for the production halt," he added.

The situation at the spinning mills

is the worst, said A Matin Chowdhury, managing director of Malek Spinning Mills.

The spinning, dyeing and washing plants require continuous supply of gas with adequate pressure.

"We stopped production in our spinning mills due to the gas crunch. As a result, I am unable to supply yarn to the knitters from my factory."

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Deal to promote global standards of electrical products

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The South Asian Regional Standards Organisation (Sarso) and International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) have recently signed an agreement to promote the development and adoption of global standards for electrical products in the region.

The two organisations signed the agreement on October 9 in Frankfurt, Germany.

Frans Vreeswijk, general secretary and chief executive of IEC, and Syed Humayun Kabir, director general of Sarso, signed the agreement on behalf of their respective organisations, according to a press release.

"This agreement will be helpful to strengthen the cooperation between IEC and Sarso in a number of areas, covering especially cross representation and exchange of information," said Sarso, headquartered in Dhaka.

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1 cr unregistered SIMs blocked in crackdown

MUHAMMAD ZAHIDUL ISLAM

The telecom industry lost more than one crore subscribers in August alone after the regulator decided to deactivate connections that were not verified biometrically.

The total number of active mobile connections stood at 11.84 crore at the end of August, down from 12.89 crore in July.

The decline is nothing to be worried about as there was a huge duplication in the customer database earlier, said Shahjahan Mahmood, chairman of Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission.

"This decline will not affect the industry - that's for sure. Now, we have got a clean and authentic database of our mobile users."

TIM Nurul Kabir, secretary general of the Association of Mobile Telecom Operators of Bangladesh, echoed the same.

"We expected this to happen. We are in a transformation stage and operators are so far okay with it," Kabir added.

Of the deactivated SIMs, about 88 lakh had active internet connection -- a development that will have a negative impact on mobile data usage.

The tally of active mobile internet connections stood at 5.12 crore at the close of August, down from previous month's 6.01 crore.

In December last year, the government made it mandatory to biometrically re-

MOBILE INTERNET CONNECTIONS

Figures in crore

SOURCE: BTRC



register all SIMs.

The process continued until May 31 this year, and from June the operators began deactivating the unregistered SIMs.

Some 11.60 crore SIMs were verified biometrically until May 31; a few lakh SIMs were re-registered after the deadline by paying a penalty, BTRC officials said.

Meanwhile, state-owned Teletalk blocked 23 lakh SIMs in August, according to a parliamentary standing committee report.

If a SIM is not used in 90 days, it will be declared inactive, according to the regulations.

The telecom regulator is yet to publish its monthly report on SIM connections for August, though they collected information from all operators three weeks ago.

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Furniture fair kicks off in Dhaka



People visit a stall of the five-day furniture fair that began at International Convention Centre Bashundhara in Dhaka yesterday.

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

A five-day furniture fair began in the capital yesterday with a view to promoting the sector both locally and internationally.

Bangladesh Furniture Industry Owners' Association has organised the exhibition at International Convention Centre Bashundhara.

Twenty-six leading furniture makers are taking part in the fair to display their products.

Speaking at the event, Mafruha Sultana, vice-chairman of the Export Promotion Bureau, said there is huge demand for

Bangladeshi furniture products in the global market.

She stressed the need for using modern technology and skilled manpower in the sector.

The main purpose of the fair is to inform the local people and foreign customers of the quality of the products manufactured in Bangladesh, said Selim H Rahman, president of the association.

He urged the government to provide necessary support to the local furniture manufacturers, to develop the skills of the workers.

The fair is open to visitors from 10am to 9pm without any entry fee.

Facebook has special plans for Bangladesh

Its director says they will develop products for cheap handsets

MUHAMMAD ZAHIDUL ISLAM

Facebook has taken up special plans for countries like Bangladesh to help flourish its business in this region, said a senior official of the social media's regional office in Singapore.

In an interview with The Daily Star recently, Fergus O'Hare, director of Facebook creative shop for Asia-Pacific region, said they are developing content that easily matches the second generation phones mostly used in Bangladesh.

"We are developing products that will be supported by the cheapest handsets, which will also be helpful for the marketing guys," said O'Hare, while attending the third edition of Digital Marketing Summit held in Dhaka.

O'Hare said, along with India and Bangladesh, this region is growing phenomenally with digital content and they are targeting the users who are active on their platform.

Around 11 crore people are connected through mobile phone in this country and the market is mature enough for voice, he said. "Now the opportunity lies in digitisation."

In Bangladesh, there are 6.33 crore active internet connections, 6 crore of whom are on mobile phones as of July. Furthermore, smartphones account for half of the



Fergus O'Hare

mobile internet connections.

"We always try to develop products that are beyond our users' phone configuration. From Facebook, when we develop any content, we focus on the phone quality, its bandwidth use pattern as well as the users' demand."

O'Hare is known as the 'rock star' of Facebook because of his epic presentations. After working for 17 years as a writer and creative director in global advertising agencies in Paris and New York with many global accounts like Louis Vuitton, Dove, Coke, IBM, Motorola, Nestlé, Duracell and Ford, he joined Facebook two

years back.

Facebook has introduced an initiative called internet.org to connect people who are using mobile phones, but not internet, to the world's largest social media site, said O'Hare.

"Sometimes, internet is costlier in different countries for different segments of people. But internet.org will connect them without any cost."

In Bangladesh, mobile operator Robi introduced this service two years back, which became popular and lots of Robi customers used the internet with this facility.

"Through this process, we are

trying to connect people across the world."

Facebook is also trying to develop lighter content, which would reduce costs, said O'Hare.

Referring to the Bangladeshi market, he said people here are mostly using feature phones and Facebook is trying to develop products that people need.

He said they have more than 1.7 crore users in Bangladesh at present. "The rate of growth is faster than the birth rate of the country."

"It is an emerging market for us and we are nursing our users, but I have no information on how much Facebook earns from this segment as advertising revenue."

However, O'Hare acknowledges that there is huge demand for Facebook advertising here.

On the much debated topic of privacy, O'Hare said they have never sold any particular Facebook user's information to any advertising agency.

Describing the process, he said Facebook uses an algorithm, and if any user likes a product, then related advertising will knock that user with targeted products.

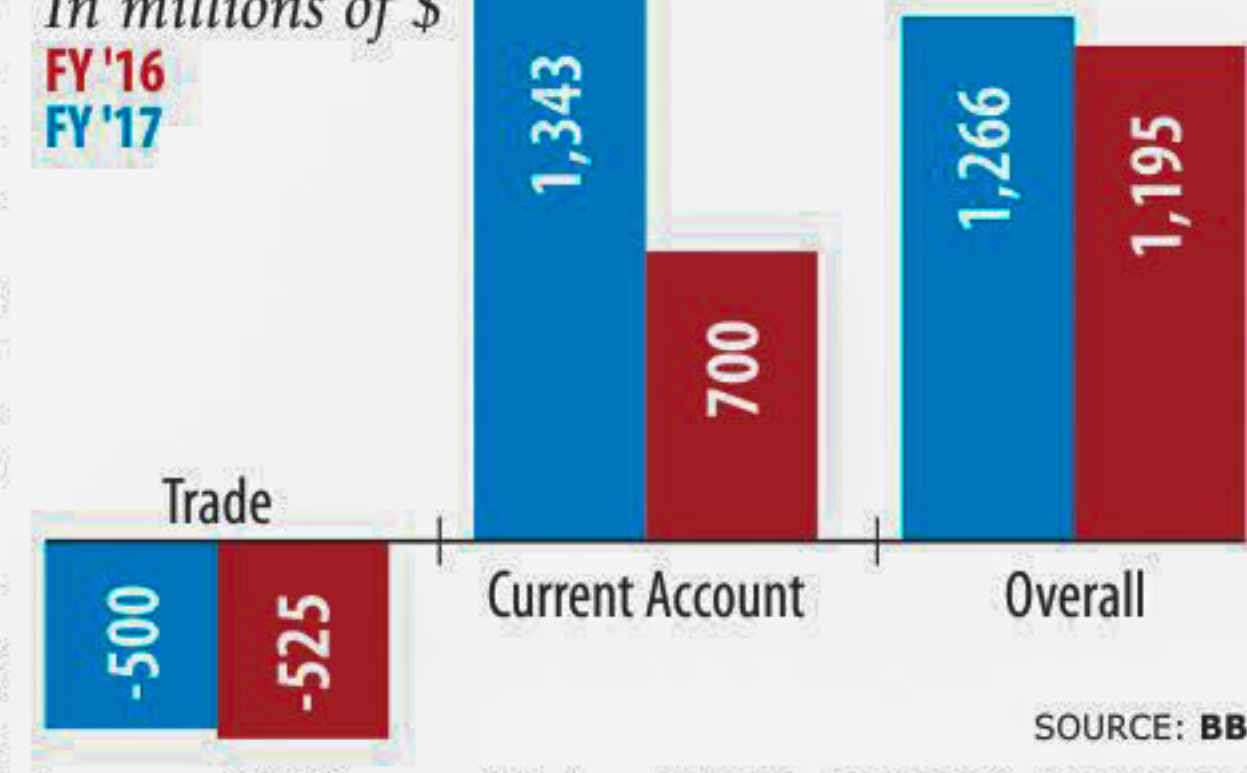
"We never read any user's inbox messages, but following the algorithm, we try to understand the user's likings and show advertisements on their wall with it."

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Trade deficit widens 5pc as import rises

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

BALANCE OF PAYMENTS (JUL-AUG)



capital goods 17.43 percent.

As a result of a big fall in remittance, the surplus in the current account balance in the first two months fell to about half compared to last year's.

In the first two months of fiscal 2016-17, current account surplus was \$700 million, down from last year's \$1,343 million, according to Bangladesh Bank data.

The current account surplus decreased due to the slump in remittance inflow, said a central bank official.

In the first two months of the fiscal year, remittance fell 15.67 percent.

However, the overall surplus in the first two months of the current fiscal year was same as the corresponding period in the last fiscal year.

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