



An ongoing project for the “Development and Operation of Two Jetties at Mongla Port, Bagerhat, Bangladesh” being implemented through SAIF Port Holdings by Mongla Port Authority. The photo was taken last week.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

# Saif Powertec invests Tk 1,600cr to build jetty at Mongla port

Seeks to set up another multimodal container terminal on railway’s land in Narsingdi

SOHEL PARVEZ and TUHN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Saif Powertec, a logistics and container supply chain management provider, is building a multipurpose jetty at the Mongla port with an estimated investment of around Tk 1,600 crore to handle both container and cargo ships, said officials yesterday.

The jetty will be able to handle two ships at a time after the completion of its construction by June next year, said Tarafder Md Ruhul Amin, managing director of Saif Powertec.

The terminal, which is 380 metres in length, is being built on 25 hectares just beside the jetty of the Mongla port, the country’s second-biggest seaport after the Chattogram port.

“Mongla port has huge potential,” Amin said, adding that nearly 90 per cent of containers are Dhaka-bound.

The distance between Dhaka and Mongla will reduce significantly after the opening of the Padma bridge.

“The cost and time for shipping containers will come down to a large

extent if we can divert a portion of containers from Chattogram port. Risk factors will also decline,” said the official of Saif Powertec.

The company handles export and import containers at the Chattogram Container Terminal and the New Mooring Container Terminal at the Chattogram port.

The logistics provider is also building the first multi-modal container depot on the land of the Bangladesh Railway (BR) at Halishahar in the port city. The depot will be able to handle 300,000 TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent units) of containers.

Recently, Saif Logistics Alliance expressed interest to build another multimodal container terminal on the railway’s land near Ghorashal railway station in Narsingdi.

Out of 32 lakh TEUs of containers handled at the Chattogram port in the last fiscal year, around 15 lakh TEUs were inbound, according to Amin.

These goods were transported to other parts of the country from the port through trucks which is risky

and costly. Heavily loaded trucks also cause damages to the roads, he said.

He said Saif wanted to build the terminal in Ghorashal as an extended facility as the space of the multimodal terminal being built in Chattogram was not enough.

Belal Uddin, managing director of BR’s concern Container Company of Bangladesh Ltd, said, “We will have to evaluate economic potential. Besides, we need to examine legal provision whether another terminal could be built under the same contract.”

At the Mongla port, the company is constructing the facility under the public-private partnership (PPP) arrangement. Once completed, the jetty would be able to handle nearly one crore tonnes of break-bulk cargoes and 350,000 TEUs of containers at its peak capacity.

Until now, 45 per cent of the construction work of the jetty at the Mongla port has been completed and around 50 per cent of the investment has been made, Amin said.

The Mongla Port Authority (MPA) allowed Saif to construct the jetty on the build, operate and transfer basis in 2019 and the construction started the following year.

Under the jetty project, Saif Port Holdings Ltd will do the engineering, procurement and construction of the facility. It will make the investment and operate the port for 30 years.

The project was scheduled for completion in June this year, but it was delayed because of the pandemic, rainfall and problems in the design of the jetty, Amin said.

Currently, the MPA has five jetties and the construction of two more jetties under the PPP will enhance the capacity of the port.

“As we don’t have gantry crane at our jetties, we use mobile harbour crane,” said Commodore Md Abdul Wadud Tarafder, member for harbour and marine of MPA.

“There will be gantry cranes at the new jetties. This will increase the handling capacity of the port. Turnaround time will also reduce.”

## IFIC Bank to sell its stake in Nepali bank for Tk 439cr

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

IFIC Bank is set to sell its entire holding of Nepal Bangladesh Bank Ltd (NBBL) to a Nepalese national for Tk 439 crore.

Sarika Chaudhary, a resident of Kathmandu, will buy the stake of the bank at 618.7 crore Nepalese rupee. One Nepalese rupee is equivalent to Tk 0.71.

IFIC Bank decided to sell its entire 40.41 per cent stake in of NBBL, said the private commercial lender of Bangladesh in a filing on the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) yesterday.

It would complete the sale after taking approvals of Nepal Rastra Bank and other regulatory authorities, the bank said.

Sarika Chaudhary is wife of Binod Chaudhary, the richest man in Nepal as well as the first billionaire in the country.

NBBL is a joint venture company, which started its banking operation in 1994. IFIC Bank held around 50 per cent shares of the bank at the time.

IFIC share closed 1.72 per cent higher at Tk 17.70 on the DSE yesterday.

## Hopes for recovery in focus at Asia’s biggest airshow

AFP, Singapore

Asia’s biggest airshow takes place in Singapore this week with the aviation sector hoping 2022 marks a turning point in a region where tough curbs have left coronavirus-battered airlines struggling to recover.

The event, which takes place every two years and kicks off on Tuesday, brings together hundreds of airlines, plane manufacturers and other industry players to display their latest equipment, network, and strike deals.

But the pandemic – which has been the biggest crisis to ever strike the sector – will cast a long shadow, with industry leaders focused on the question of whether air travel will finally pick up in the Asia Pacific.

While the United States and Europe have eased restrictions and demand has rebounded, Asia lags far behind, with foreign tourists barred and mandatory quarantines still in place in many countries.

There are positive signs for 2022 – several places, such as Australia, New Zealand and the Philippines, are lifting bans on overseas visitors – but industry figures warn there is a long way to go.

“We’ve seen the recovery come in very, very strong in North America and Europe when the restrictions were eased,” Anand Stanley, the Asia-Pacific chief for European plane-maker Airbus, told a forum before the airshow.

“Asia still has to follow that track. We still have semblances of a quarantine-based regime, border closures. This has to be lifted so that the freedom of movement returns and in turn the demand returns.”

## Uniform export

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“Accordingly, the industry is switching to technical and high-end value-added garment items. A good number of garment factories are already supplying uniforms to fire departments in many countries.”

The BGMEA is carrying out a study in collaboration with an Indian firm to find out the markets of uniforms so that local manufacturers can raise their share in the segment. The outcomes of the study might be known within the next two to three months.

Local garment producers have targeted two kinds of uniforms: professional and school uniforms.

Currently, many factories are exporting school uniforms to European nations.

However, making professional uniforms is complicated and expensive as it needs a lot of coarse

yarn. As Bangladesh does not produce cotton, Pakistan is performing strongly in the segment since the country is a major producer of the key textile raw material, Hassan said.

Mohammad Ali Khokon, president of the Bangladesh Textile Mills Association, says currently, some mills are producing military and tent fabrics and supplying them to other countries.

“Many mills are capable of producing uniform fabrics as they have upgraded technologies.”

Manufacturing fabrics for professional uniforms requires strong printing technologies in which Bangladesh is already a good performer, the entrepreneur added.

“Bangladesh is investing to produce man-made fibre. So, local weavers can supply the required fabrics to garment makers for the production of more uniform fabrics.”

## BSTI to establish 69

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Standards (BDS) for four key rooftop solar power generation equipment and made the BSTI certifications compulsory for their sale and marketing, Anwar said.

Quality and regulatory issues must be addressed for rooftop solar power generation units in order to tackle emerging challenges and attain upcoming targets for the renewable energy sector, said Ferdaus Ara Begum, chief executive officer of the BUILD.

It is important for rooftop

solar power generation equipment manufacturers, importers and businesses to get registered with a relevant government agency, such as the Sustainable and Renewable Energy Development Authority, she said.

Existing laboratories that test rooftop solar power generation equipment often lack the technology and capacity for testing certain components, especially ones of high capacities, said Md Tahmid Zami, additional research director of the BUILD.

## Rains ruin raw bricks

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Prices of coal have almost doubled, said Rakib.

“We hardly find anyone to look up to for support in this industry. No person or institution wants to stand beside us,” he alleged.

For one brick kiln owner in Duhuli village of Nilphamari sadar upazila, the loss in earnings amounted to Tk 50 lakh.

Around 5 lakh raw bricks at the manufacturing unit of Mahbubur Rahman, owner of NBL Bricks, has turned to mud as the sudden rains did not provide the slightest scope of laying out a covering of polythene sheets.

Rain not only damaged three lakh raw bricks of Hiralal Roy, manager of SMN Bricks, but also resulted in water seeping into and damaging his kiln at Laxmanpur village in Saidpur upazila.

Regaining productivity will likely take three to four weeks, he said.

There are 54 brick kilns in the northwestern district of Nilphamari.

President of the district’s brick kiln owners’ association, Selim Dewan, claimed that the district suffered damages to raw bricks anywhere in the range of Tk 10 lakh to Tk 12 crore, which would be difficult to recoup.

“We are an integral part of visible development and the government should provide us support with respect to our existence,” he added.

“All the affected kiln owners have to spend an additional Tk 4 lakh to

Tk 5 lakh to remove the damaged raw bricks from the kiln premises which will increase the losses,” said Mahmudar Rahman, owner of MSB Bricks at Khutamara village in Jaldhaka upazila.

“From the beginning of the season, brick kiln owners have been facing hurdles due to abnormally high prices of coal and the untimely rain raised their expenditures,” said Harunur Rashid, secretary of the association.

Inevitably, the costs would be passed onto the shoulders of customers. Brick kiln owners believe prices of bricks may rise further this year, saying their existence would otherwise be at stake.

Recent heavy rains have been the cause of much distress for both owners and workers, said Abdur Rashid, general secretary of the Dhamrai Brick Kilns Association.

In most cases, the brick kiln owners have to provide payments in advance to contractual workers. “Once the raw bricks get damaged, we have to count losses over the payments,” he said.

There are 165 brick kilns in Dhamrai upazila under Dhaka district and most will have to count huge losses, he added.

For the 50 or so brick kilns in Tangail’s Ghatail upazila, the losses could be around Tk 10 crore, according to the owners.

It has been raining there for the past three days since Thursday afternoon,

sometimes heavy downpours and sometimes drizzles.

A visit revealed production having been put on hold at different brick kilns due to waterlogging. The temporary shutdown has also left more than 5,000 workers out of work.

Syed Tanzizul Aziz, owner of PYS Brick Kiln at Dhalapara, told The Daily Star that he incurred at least Tk 10 lakh in losses.

“Previously I had been struggling to burn bricks this season due to high prices of coal. Now, the untimely rains have left me in a tight spot,” he added.

“Moulding 1,000 raw bricks cost about Tk 3,500. As such, my own loss is about Tk 30 lakh,” said Mostofa Kamal, owner of two brick kilns at Chantara village.

“If I want to resume production, I have to start anew. It is a big loss for me which cannot be compensated,” he said.

The rains spoiled about five lakh raw bricks, meaning a loss of Tk 15 lakh, said Mithun Miah, manager of Ghatail Bricks at Lauagram area.

“Many low-income owners will lose their capital while many others will have to start anew,” said Faruk Hossain Dhala, general secretary of the upazila’s brickfield owners’ association.

“As a result, brick prices may rise and a shortage of bricks may hit the market this year.”

## Mobile payments

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“Due to the increasing convenience of digital transactions, there is a rising trend of digital payments,” said Shamsuddin Haider Dalim, head of corporate communication at bKash, the top MFS provider in Bangladesh.

Besides regular transactions, including person-to-person money transfer, mobile airtime recharge, bank-to-bKash money transfer and utility bill payments, merchant payment is gaining momentum significantly in the MFS sector, he said.

To popularise it even more, bKash is promoting the digital payment service through various offers, which is reflected in the overall transaction amount of December 2021, he added.

**E C O M M E R C E PURCHASES THROUGH CARDS RECOVER SLOWLY**

C a r d - b a s e d e-commerce transactions

also increased 38 per cent year-on-year in December to Tk 825 crore. Compared to that of November 2021, it was a rise of 3 per cent.

The transactions registered an all-time high of Tk 1,277 crore in June last year. It was Tk 1,184 crore in May.

After it emerged that some e-commerce platforms had collectively racked up thousands of crores of taka in dues to both customers and merchants by asking for advance payments but not delivering the products on time, buyers ended up going back to the tried and tested cash on delivery system.

Subsequently, in July, customers spent Tk 740 crore on products and services online by using cards, which was 42 per cent less than the all-time high.

However, now it has started to rebound with slight increases every month since August, excluding October.

## Credit growth instills

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“This has also created optimism for the economy to stay the course and improve further sidestepping the pandemic jitters.”

The credit growth target set by the central bank will likely be achieved because of the recovery in demand, said Rahman, who completed his post-graduation in economics from Jahangirnagar University.

He obtained his

master’s degree in economics and earned a PhD in applied economics respectively from the Eastern Michigan University and the Western Michigan University of the United States.

Rahman is scheduled to hold the post of the chief economist of the BB until March 2025 when he will retire. Mustafa Kamal Mujeri was the first chief economist of the central bank.

## Boeing confident of working through any disruption

REUTERS, Singapore

Boeing Co is confident of working through any potential disruption in titanium supplies due to its “very diverse” supply base, a senior executive at the US manufacturer said on Monday.

Boeing relies heavily on Russia’s VSMPO-AVISMA for the supply of titanium, a lightweight but strong metal that is used widely in planemaking.

“We’ve got a very diverse titanium supply now,” Boeing Commercial Airplanes head Stan Deal told reporters in a briefing ahead of the Singapore Airshow, which starts on Tuesday.

“I will tell you that diversity gives us an opportunity to work through any disruption in the supply chain relative to titanium.”

Industry sources said Western aerospace firms have been increasing inventory or diversifying sources of supply since 2014 when Russia was sanctioned for its annexation of Crimea from Ukraine, even though titanium was not directly targeted.

Their situation has been made easier by the fact that fewer jets are being assembled as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, giving them opportunities to stockpile reserves.