



Trucks carrying imported goods from India are compelled to wait on the road leading to the Burimari land port in Lalmonirhat for hours due to the traffic congestion caused by the space shortage inside the second-largest land port in Bangladesh. This causes delays regularly in the unloading of goods. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: S DILIP ROY

Burimari land port plagued by space shortage, tailbacks

S DILIP ROY

The Burimari land port has long been suffering from space shortage and traffic congestion, preventing businesses from Bangladesh from elevating trade with India, Bhutan and Nepal as its capacity has not expanded in line with rising commerce.

The country's second-largest land port, located in Lalmonirhat district, has become an important route for the country's trade with India and Bhutan and has been playing a vital role for the development of the local economy.

But the barriers created by the space constraints and traffic congestion have not allowed it to reap its full potential since opening in 1988 and the launch of the full-fledged operations in 2010.

Ranjit Das, an Indian truck driver who brought imported goods to the port, says they have to stay in the open stackyard for two to four days as the goods are not unloaded on time.

"This causes traffic jam inside the yard. If the land port is expanded, many trucks will be able to wait there and it will not create any congestion."

Shamim Hossain, an importer and exporter, says trade through the port has expanded. But the capacity of the land port has not increased in keeping with the commerce growth.

"Traffic congestion is a major problem. Because of this, we can't unload products on time. It is a waste of time and money."

He urged the authorities to take steps to expand the capacity of the port to



ensure the convenience of traders.

In 2015-2016, some 13.36 lakh tonnes of imported goods were brought in through the port. It rose to 46.13 lakh tonnes in FY21.

The land port authorities earned Tk 66.75 crore in 2020-2021, up from Tk 47.64 crore a year ago.

The customs authorities generated revenue of Tk 111 crore last fiscal year, doubling from Tk 57 crore in 2019-2020. The revenue collection is expected to increase in the current fiscal year.

At present, 450-500 trucks enter the port every day with imported goods from India and Bhutan, while 60-65 Bangladeshi trucks carry goods to India, according to the Bangladesh Land Port Authority (BLPA).

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, 7,000-7,500 international passengers from Bangladesh, India, Bhutan and Nepal used the port every day to move to and from Bangladesh.

The port has three sheds with a combined capacity to hold 1,768 tonnes of goods and three open yards with a capacity of 6,203 tonnes.

Sayeduzzaman Saeed, president of the Burimari Land Port C&F Agents Association, says Indian businessmen are keen to expand business through the port.

"Only after the expansion of the land port is completed and the traffic congestion is eliminated, the interested traders will be able to do their business in full swing."

Ruhul Amin Babul, president of the importer-exporter group at the port and chairman of the Patgram Upazila Parishad, says the port has the potential to expand Bangladesh-India-Bhutan trade.

Traders are coming here to do business as goods can be brought in from India and Bhutan at a lower cost. "If the space crisis and traffic congestion are resolved, Burimari will become a commercial hub."

Babul says since the land port was established in 1988, it has been playing a significant role in the economic development of the region. Before the port was opened, poverty was high in the region. The situation has changed a lot in the last three decades.

Kefayet Ullah Majumder, deputy commissioner for customs at the port, says even throughout the pandemic period, the revenue earnings had far exceeded the target.

As it is an important port, the BLPA has taken initiatives to solve the problem facing the port, he said.

Ruhul Amin, assistant director of the BLPA at the port, says preparations have been made to acquire 23.86 acres of land to expand the capacity of the port.

Of the land, 20.35 acres are owned by the government and 3.51 acres are privately owned. The expansion work of the port, which is currently located on 11.15 acres of land, will start soon by acquiring the land.

Parking terminals for the trucks carrying imported and exported goods, empty truck terminals and passenger terminals will be constructed, he said.

Cut supply chain costs to keep essentials affordable

Says DCCI president

SUKANTA HALDER

Any fuel price hike raises the cost of everyday necessities and agricultural products and affects both food and non-food inflation since it is linked with every part of the value chain.

"It also increases transport cost as well as the production and harvesting cost, hurting farmers," said Rizwan Rahman, president of the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI).

He says extortion and corruption in the supply chain of the transport system increase the price that needs to be checked and stopped.

Cold chain and frozen van storage should be operational to supply vegetables to urban areas.

Frozen carriages in railway can be introduced.

The chamber leader called on the government to fix inter-city transport fares for trucks and covered vans in order to reduce price distortion.

Food carriers can be given subsidies in fuel price as a support to lower the price of goods and products.

Rahman suggested strengthening the linkage between producers and retailers using virtual platforms to cut the middlemen and keep prices reasonably lower.

He says due to customs procedural delay, much time is being consumed in customs clearance resulting in the wastage of imported perishable products. "River networks, land port infrastructure and logistics must be adequate. Seaport infrastructure for imported items such as lentils, garlic, onion and ginger and their customs clearance process must be quicker."

"Ports must be equipped with automation for priority clearance and for storing foods for longer preservation. On highways, trucks and vans carrying essential food items should have priority movement."

He recommended forming a strong market monitoring cell combining consumers, sellers, chamber representatives, and government officials formed.

According to Rahman, research on consumer behaviour is crucial because it helps marketers understand what influences the buying decisions of customers.

He also says all targets, projections and plans in the monetary policy, as well as the Eighth Five-Year Plan, should be revised in accordance with the new base year of 2015-16 for inflation.

The inflation target in the 8th five-year plan was 4.6 per cent based on the previous base year of FY2005-06. Since the GDP base year has changed to 2015-16 and the economy's size and growth calculations are done using the new base year, the inflation target would be changed accordingly.

"If assessed based on the new base year, inflation target may hike."

In order to understand the purchasing power of middle and lower income groups and expenses for essential commodities in urban and rural

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US says looking for ways to cut use of Russian oil

AFP, Washington

The White House is looking for ways to reduce US consumption of Russian oil while protecting American families from price hikes, an administration spokeswoman said Friday.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has sent oil prices soaring to their highest levels since 2014.

While Western allies' severe financial sanctions on Moscow have so far exempted oil transactions, pressure has been building for new sanctions targeting Russia's main source of cash -- oil exports.

"We are looking at ways to reduce the import of Russian oil while also making sure that we are maintaining the global supply needs out there," White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki told reporters.

"We are very focused on minimising the impact to families," she said.

Amid reports buyers are already shunning oil from Russia, futures prices on Friday were above \$115 a barrel.

The US Commerce Department on Friday announced additional restrictions on Russian industry, including barring exports of key refining equipment to "limit Russia's ability to raise revenue from the sale of its refined products, including gasoline, that it can use to support its military efforts."

White House chief economic adviser Brian Deese told financial channel CNBC on Friday that the administration is keeping close tabs on the global oil market.

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This photo taken on February 17, 2022 shows a working oil pumpjack in Signal Hill, Los Angeles County, California.

PHOTO: AFP

Samsung Electronics suspends shipments to Russia

AFP, Seoul

Samsung Electronics has suspended shipments to Russia over "geopolitical developments", the firm said Saturday, as major firms including Apple cut ties with the country over its invasion of Ukraine.

The South Korean tech giant is the world's biggest memory chip maker and the leading smartphone seller in Russia.

"Due to current geopolitical developments, shipments to Russia have been suspended," Samsung said in a statement.

"We continue to actively monitor this complex situation to determine our next steps."

The decision comes as Western governments, sporting organizations and big companies cut Russia off and deal it punishing sanctions over the internationally condemned attack on its neighbor.