

CONSUMER RIGHTS PROTECTION AGENCY

One-fifth complaints unsettled last fiscal year

SUKANTA HALDER

Abdul Hakim, a businessman from Kaliakair upazila of Gazipur district, had paid in advance for several products from Evercare Agro Food and Beverage Ltd in January but upon receiving the goods, he immediately informed the company that they were damaged.

Seeing as the matter remained unresolved, Hakim then lodged a complaint with the Directorate of National Consumer Rights Protection (DNCRP) in mid-June but to no avail.

Another case is that of Afroza Akhter, a resident of the capital's Uttara area, who had ordered three motorbikes from Dhamaka Shopping in June 2021 by paying around Tk 4 lakh in advance.

Akhter is yet to receive delivery even though the e-commerce platform promised the bikes would be delivered within 45 working days and so, she too submitted a complaint to the DNCRP.

But like Hakim, her case remains

unresolved to this day.

According to DNCRP data, the national consumer rights body received a total of 14,654 complaints in fiscal year 2021-22.

Among these complaints, 11,541 cases were settled while the remaining 3,113, or about 21 per cent, are yet to be disposed of.

Similarly, 14,910 complaints were received in fiscal 2020-21, when 11,623 cases were settled. As such, 3,287, or 22 per cent, of the cases are still open.

Hakim had paid initially paid Tk 40,000 in advance for his products but after complaining that they were damaged, Evercare Agro Good and Beverage took an additional Tk 38,000 in February on the promise of providing better goods.

After the second set of products arrived, he found that those too were damaged and again informed the company,

which asked for another Tk 25,000.

But despite making these multiple payments, Hakim is yet to receive the proper goods or a refund.

Hakim then complained to the DNCRP and a hearing was subsequently called last week but no one from Evercare Agro Food and Beverage was present.

The Daily Star tried to contact Evercare Agro Food and Beverage for a comment regarding the issue but the company did not respond by the time this report was filed.

A DNCRP official said letters had been sent to officials of the company, asking them to appear at the hearing.

"If they do not show up at the next hearing, then the organization will be raided," he added.

Mohammad Hasanuzzaman, assistant director of complaints at the DNCRP, said the main reason for complaints remaining

unresolved in the last fiscal year is that they were unable to find the person or entity against whom the complaint was made.

In fiscal 2021-22, accused individuals and establishments across the country were fined for various offenses, including adulterated products, false advertisements, weight manipulation and more.

AHM Shafiquzzaman, director general of the DNCRP, said they are trying to resolve the complaints with due diligence.

SM Nazer Hossain, vice-president of the Consumers Association of Bangladesh, said some complaints remain unsettled every year.

"That is why some laws of the agency have to be changed and besides, we are facing a manpower crunch," he added.

Hossain went on to say that the number of complaints is increasing every year but this is a positive sign as it means that consumer awareness has improved.

KEY POINTS

- DNCRP chief says they are trying to resolve complaints with due importance
- CAB says some rules of DNCRP have to be changed
- CAB suggested increasing manpower of DNCRP
- Main reason behind low rate of settlement: accused are hard to track

OFFENCES INCLUDE

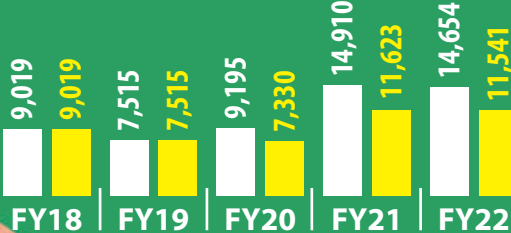
- Not using product wrappers
- Not displaying prices
- Keeping prices above prescribed rates
- Selling adulterated products
- Cheating thru false ads
- Weight manipulation

COMPLAINTS AND SETTLEMENT

(In number)

■ Complaints ■ Settled

SOURCE: DNCRP



First digital factoring platform goes live today

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Think Big Solutions, a local fintech company, will launch today a digital platform on factoring to provide financing solutions to small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

Named Tredxonline, the platform aims to bring together SMEs, financial institutions, corporations and their suppliers to facilitate access to supply chain finance for SMEs, Think Big Solutions said in a statement yesterday.

M Masrur Reaz, managing director of Think Big Solutions, said SMEs account for one-fourth of the country's gross domestic product but still, a large number of them have limited access to formal finance.

Micro, small and medium enterprises are always struggling for access to credit as they sorely lack collateral. Besides, SMEs also have their working capital stuck in invoices that are payable by larger corporations.

"So, factoring as a product is best suited to meet the needs of SME suppliers, wherein the factoring companies and banks could have discounted their approved invoices and provided the suppliers with much needed liquidity," he said.

Factoring is a financial arrangement under which a firm sells its accounts receivable or invoices to a third party at a discount to meet its immediate capital needs.

"But even though factoring has been available in Bangladesh for over a decade, factoring as a product class has not actually taken off," Reaz added.

The managing director went on to say that TREDX will ensure that suppliers of good corporations always get the best discount rates and the corporations themselves will be satisfied that their key suppliers always have access to low cost funds from all financial institutions.

Turkish inflation nearing 81pc

REUTERS, Istanbul

Turkey's inflation is expected to near 81 per cent in July and was seen declining to just 70 per cent by end 2022, a Reuters poll showed on Friday, as global energy and commodity costs and the lira's steady decline continue to push prices higher.

Inflation has surged since last autumn, when the lira slumped after the central bank gradually cut its policy rate by 500 basis points to 14 per cent in an easing cycle sought by President Tayyip Erdogan. It has been further stoked this year by the economic fallout from Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as well as the lira's continued decline. The currency shed 44 per cent against the dollar last year, and is down 27 per cent this year.

The median estimate 10 institutions who participated in the Reuters poll for annual inflation in July was 80.50 per cent, with forecasts ranging between 79.45 per cent and 82.50 per cent.

That would make it the highest reading since August 1998, when annual inflation was 81.4 per cent and Turkey was battling to end a decade of chronically high inflation. The median forecast for the monthly figure was 2.90 per cent, in a range of 2.28 per cent and 4 per cent.

New census points to digital divide

FROM PAGE B1

The BTRC measures the teledensity on the basis of active SIMs, not unique customers, said an official of the commission.

Abu Saeed Khan, a senior policy fellow at Colombo-based think-tank LIRNEasia, says teledensity must be measured based on unique customers.

"For example, if I have four telephone connections, I shouldn't be counted as four different subscribers. Rather, I should be considered as a single subscriber."

The findings on mobile owners in the population census support the data of the GSMA, an industry organisation that represents the interests of mobile network operators worldwide.

The GSMA estimates that about half of Bangladesh's population remains unconnected to a mobile network and only 31 per cent are using mobile internet services, lower than the South Asian average.

Economic conditions have left

many in Bangladesh without a mobile phone as well.

For instance, Arzu Begum, a domestic help who lives in Mirpur, says only two persons in her six-member family own a mobile phone.

LIRNEasia's Khan blamed the intermediaries in the telecommunication sector and the government policy for the lower mobile and internet penetration.

"The telecommunication sector is full of middlemen and the competition has been blocked by the government," he said.

"If mobile network operators are not allowed to sell smartphones and SIM in a package, smartphone and internet penetration will not go up."

If operators can sell smartphones, customers will be able to purchase them in instalments."

HOW MANY PEOPLE USE INTERNET?

In late May, Grameenphone, Robi and Banglalink, the three private mobile network operators in Bangladesh with a combined

market share of more than 96 per cent in terms of subscribers, shared smartphone penetration among their subscribers. The penetration averaged 48 per cent.

Even if half of the 12 crore unique customers use internet, the total number of mobile internet users would be six crore. And if 1.26 crore broadband internet users are added to the number, internet users would total 7.23 crore.

The Daily Star spoke to 10 people with broadband facilities at their homes or offices and found that eight of them purchase at least one mobile internet data package once a month.

AKM Fahim Mashroor, chief executive officer of bdjobs.com and AjkerDeal, thinks the number of internet users is now close to five crore.

"From the usage of data on various social media platforms and popular local websites and apps, we know that 4-5 crore people use internet in Bangladesh. However, high-frequency users would number 1.5 crores to 2 crores."

Port facilities compliant

FROM PAGE B1

The delegation will inspect if security measures in place at the port comply with the International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code, sources said.

The team will meet the director general of the Department of Shipping in Dhaka today.

During the three-day visit, the team will meet CPA officials and also visit different port facilities, several private inland container depots (ICDs) and the sole state-owned oil refinery, Eastern Refinery Limited.

After their visit, the team will submit its annual audit report about the port's security compliance to the US Coast Guard head office.

The US Coast Guard's IPS programme was established in 2003 to reinforce implementation of the ISPS Code aimed at reducing risks to US ports, ships, and the global maritime transport system.

The CPA started improving its

security systems since July 1, 2004 in compliance with the ISPS Code ratified by the International Maritime Organisation.

During the US Coast Guard's last visit in 2019, the team gave some recommendations for improving security at Chattogram port, such as installing better security systems at entry and exit points and ensuring scanning of export containers.

Rear Admiral M Shahjahan, chairman of the CPA, claimed most of the requirements have already been implemented while the purchase of scanners for export containers is underway.

After a fire devastated a private ICD on June 4, the CPA met with various stakeholders, including shipping agents, feeder vessel operators and freight forwarders, and issued several directions to comply with International Maritime Dangerous Goods (IMDG) Code of the International Maritime Organisation

(IMO).

Citing the steps taken to ensure compliance under ISPS Code, Shahjahan said he is fully confident that the US Coast Guard team will be satisfied with the port's security measures.

Asked why the port is yet to install scanners for export containers, Shahjahan said the tender procedure has already started to procure two scanners.

A senior official of the CPA, on condition of anonymity, said they have implemented all the recommendations as per their responsibility.

However, some requirements which are linked with the customs authority are yet to be fully implemented.

Since the customs authority delayed the purchase of scanners, the CPA had to initiate the purchase from its own funds to comply with the requirements, he added.



ASM Shahidullah Khan, chairman of One Bank, cuts a cake at the bank's corporate headquarters in Dhaka recently to celebrate its 23rd founding anniversary. Zahur Ullah, vice-chairman of the bank, Kazi Rukunuddin Ahmed and Anannya Das Gupta, directors, admiral (retd) Aurangzeb Chowdhury, an independent director, and Md Monzur Mofiz, managing director, were present.

PHOTO: ONE BANK

Import of apparel raw materials surges

FROM PAGE B1

Another \$2.21 billion worth of woven fabrics was imported in the first half of this year, representing nearly 70 per cent of the item procured in 2021.

Millers imported raw cotton worth \$2.26 billion in January-June of 2022. It was \$3.8 billion in the last calendar year.

Currently, local spinners can supply nearly 90 per cent of the raw materials needed for the export-oriented knitwear sector and 40 per cent to the woven sector.

Mohammad Hatem, executive president of the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association, said the import value of raw materials surged in January-June because of the spike in their prices in the international markets.

"The prices of yarn, fabrics and cotton have almost doubled."

The lower pressure of gas turned acute in January, February and March this year. As a result, textile millers were not able to run their factories in full swing to produce yarn and fabrics.

The energy situation forced many garment manufacturers to import fabrics and even knitted fabrics from China to meet the increased demand.

Mohammad Ali Khokon, president of the BTMA, said cotton imports rose

sharply in January-June because of the congestion that hit international ports last year as global economies recovered from the pandemic.

The cotton that was supposed to arrive at the Chattogram port in December last year came in January or February because of the delay caused by container shortage globally, he said.

"As a result, cotton import in terms of both value and volume increased in the January-June half."

"The increased price and higher volumes drove up raw materials imports," said Mustafizur Rahman, a distinguished fellow of the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

Cotton price escalated to \$3.48 per kilogramme in the April-June quarter this year, up 71.48 per cent from \$2.03 in the identical period a year ago, commodities price data of the World Bank showed.

Various studies suggest an investigation can be conducted to see whether money is being siphoned off through under-invoicing and over-invoicing during exports and imports, said Prof Rahman.

Because of the blistering imports, which include industrial raw materials, capital machinery, fuel and edible oil, and wheat, Bangladesh's foreign currency reserves have slipped

below \$40 billion, sending the taka to a new low against the US dollar amid a shortage of the American greenback.

M A Razzaque, research director of the Policy Research Institute, accredited higher global inflation, the increase in raw materials prices and stockpiling of goods fearing supply disruption for the surge in the import value.

However, the gloomy outlook on Europe and the US means the export boom may not continue in the current fiscal year, he said.

Garment shipment clocked 35.47 per cent year-on-year growth in the last fiscal year that ended in June, netting \$42.61 billion. Of the sum, \$23.21 billion came from knitwear shipment, up 37 per cent and \$19.39 billion from woven item exports, an increase of 34 per cent, data from the Export Promotion Bureau showed.

Although Bangladesh has attracted higher volumes of orders in recent months, it has not lived up to its expectation because of the war. Still, the country will be able to reach its garment export target of nearly \$47 billion set for the current fiscal year, according to Hatem.

"The demand will not decline despite the war since Bangladesh produces basic and semi-high-end garment items. These products will always be high in demand."