



The BSCIC industrial estate in Barishal was established some 62 years ago but a number of plots remain vacant due to a lack of facilities, such as adequate approach roads and security services. Likewise, plots at many other estates across the country are still empty for various reasons.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Plots still vacant at 60-year old industrial estates

BSCIC officials say allotments will be made soon

SUKANTA HALDER

Although the Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC) had established some industrial estates as far back as the 1960s, a number of plots at these estates remain unallocated as work on land filling, constructing roads, ensuring security services and other utilities is still ongoing.

The industrial estate in Barishal is one such case as it was established back in 1960 on 130 acres of land, 33 acres of which remain low. As a result, 109 of the 470 plots available are yet to be allotted.

Sources say the fact that the plots are still unused is depriving the government of revenue, people of jobs, and small-and-medium enterprises (SME) of serviced land.

Besides, the lack of proper roads and security services has resulted in a lack of interest among entrepreneurs, they said.

Golam Rasul, industrial estate officer of the BSCIC district office in Barishal, said a project was taken up in 2015 to ready plots on the 33 acres of low land. The project is set to expire this December, but the authorities do not expect it to be completed on time.

"It will take another six months to complete the entire work as the construction of roads and boundary walls is underway. The work on filling lowlands with sand is over though," he added.

Syed Rahman Rinto, president of the Barishal Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said the BSCIC had previously taken several initiatives to convert the lowlands into plots but has so far been unable for various reasons.

The industrial estate is located at the heart of Barishal city with business



activities in the district having grown significantly in the last five decades.

Rinto then said the main approach road to the industrial estate is too narrow while the estate itself lacks the required facilities to set industries.

"For these reasons, the plots remain empty even after so many years since their establishment," he added.

There are currently 127 manufacturing units operating at the Barishal Industrial Estate, of which 119 are in production while eight are underperforming.

Another age-old industrial estate is the one in Pabna. Established in 1962, five of the 172 plots at the Pabna Industrial Estate are yet to be allotted.

Rofikul Islam, deputy general manager of the BSCIC district office in Pabna, said work is underway to allocate these plots soon as a list of applications has been sent to the head office.

These plots were once allotted but the BSCIC ultimately withdrew the allotments due to non-compliance issues among the related entrepreneurs.

Apart from this, industrial estates in Rajbari, Sylhet and Cox's Bazar that were built in the 1960s still have some vacant plots for various reasons, including legal complications.

For example, many entrepreneurs that secured allotments through political affiliation have gone abroad, leaving their plots unused for a long time and the BSCIC has been unable to reclaim them due to legal complications.

However, there are no plots vacant in the Comilla, Feni, Tongi, Mymensingh and Faujdarhat industrial estates established in the 60s.

ANM Mujibur Rouf, deputy general manager of the industrial estate division at the BSCIC, said the plots that remain unallocated are not serviced in most cases, unlike the central plots.

Some of the plots were allotted at different times but the allotments were later cancelled as the related industry was not established as per the rules.

ONLY EIGHT OF 500 VACANT PLOTS ALLOCATED

In March earlier this year, the BSCIC published newspaper advertisements seeking applications from entrepreneurs to allot 500 plots that have been lying vacant for years, even at the more recently established industrial estates.

According to the BSCIC, the industrial estate in Gopalganj has the highest number of vacant plots with 131 while the one in Moulvibazar closely follows with 119.

Meanwhile, some 50 plots at the industrial estate in Chuadanga, 43 in Jhalakathi, 40 in Barguna, 38 in Madaripur and 33 in Khagrachari are still unused.

Rouf said applications for the allotment of 165 plots have been received but only eight of them have been allocated so far.

The plots will be allotted through a "district plot allocation committee" with each one to be leased out for 99 years.

The BSCIC was set up in 1960 to develop industrial plots equipped with utility connections and connectivity to spur industrialisation.

Today, there are 11,922 plots in 80 industrial estates of the BSCIC across the country.

There are about 4,570 factories in production, of which 901 are export-oriented, at these estates. They employ over 62 lakh people with a total investment of Tk 63,318 crore so far, as per data from the BSCIC.

Aggressive IT export campaign urgent with govt support

BASIS president says

MAHMUDUL HASAN

Bangladesh's IT industry needs government support to aggressively promote local entrepreneurs' prowess among global clients, said Russell T Ahmed, president of the Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS).

"...it is high time to diversify the export basket with technology products and services...A government project of Tk 100 crore for industry promotion, led by the BASIS, would play a crucial role in IT exports," he said.



"It's not a big amount of money for the Bangladesh government, but it can bring a huge result for the country. It may bring \$10 billion for Bangladesh," he told The Daily Star in an interview.

"When we go physically to meet global clients and pitch about Bangladesh, confidence grows among them about our IT industry. It's more effective that the virtual communication," he said.

Ahmed said a BASIS delegation recently visited Austria, Hungary and the UK to increase export of homemade software.

"We met about 300 IT businessmen in the events in those countries and we are able to make at least 30 of them an ambassador of the country's IT industry," he said.

A "Festival of Sourcing" has been held in the UK for 35 years and the BASIS was given the offer to become the title partner this year and have the name of the event turned to "Sourcing festival in BASIS".

"When the offer came to us, we jumped at the chance. The entire venue was decorated with flags of Bangladesh and BASIS. It was a great opportunity for us to highlight the capabilities of the country's software sector at a world forum," said Ahmed.

Russell T Ahmed said a BASIS delegation recently visited Austria, Hungary and the UK to increase export of homemade software

He said after talking to top executives of the European IT firms they realised that there are a lot of opportunities for Bangladeshi tech firms and global IT firms have a lot of new jobs and requirements," he said.

"For some circumstances, they are searching for an alternative to India, which is a top ICT service exporter with annual exports of \$226 billion," said the BASIS president.

Indian firms are big and they like to take on big projects. So, when a project needs a few software developers, Indian companies do not show interest. So, there is a vacuum for manpower to accomplish small and medium projects, he said.

But the challenge is that although they know Bangladesh has a growing economy, they do not know Bangladesh as an ICT destination. When they are searching for an alternate destination, there is no presence of Bangladesh in their map, said Ahmed.

"So, we urgently need to promote the local IT industry to different markets...still untapped. And without government help, it's difficult for the industry to fund it alone," he added.

According to the BASIS, 34 per cent of software developed in the country was exported to the US and 13 per cent to the UK.

To European countries, it is only 4 per cent to 5 per cent, in spite of the fact that Bangladesh has potential to export more.

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Port activities delayed by NBR server glitch

MOHAMMAD SUMAN, *Chattogram*

Shipping agents are facing difficulties in submitting the registration number and import general manifest (IGM) against their vessels due to a glitch in the related server of the National Board of Revenue (NBR), leading to delays in import-export activities.

It is mandatory to submit the registration number and IGM for every vessel to be loaded or unloaded with goods at Chattogram port.

NBR officials say the problem is only temporary though as the server is simply undergoing upgradation and will be back up soon.

However, the loading and unloading of goods from eight vessels has already been delayed in the last two days, according to shipping agents and port officials.

Besides, there is an obligation to submit the IGM within 24 hours of any ship entering the territorial waters of Bangladesh, they said.

With this backdrop, the Chattogram Port Authority yesterday sent a letter to the customs commissioner saying that goods are not being unloaded or loaded onto ships that are already docked at the port jetty due to delays in submitting their registration numbers and IGM.

The letter mentions that eight vessels with imported goods had entered the port jetty but faced delays in unloading their shipment for several hours due to problems with the NBR server.

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Loading and unloading of goods from several vessels at the Chattogram port have been delayed in the last two days, according to shipping agents and port officials.



PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Apex Foods' profit more than doubles

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Apex Foods Limited's profit more than doubled in the financial year that ended on June 30 on the back of a hike in product prices and a reduction of costs.

The company made a profit of Tk 2.93 crore in 2021-22, up more than 148 per cent from Tk 1.18 crore in the previous year.

Thus, Apex Foods reported earnings per share of Tk 5.14 for 2021-22, which was Tk 2.07 a year earlier.

The company credited the increase in revenue to the global upturn in retail products, particularly food items, efficient operation, and cost minimisation for the sharp rise in the EPS.

Net asset value per share rose to Tk 126.18 from Tk 119.39, while net operating cash flow per share surged to Tk 62.14 from Tk 42.87.

The board of directors has recommended a 20

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