

BIWTA to seek 2-year extension for Nagarbari river port

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU

After missing the deadline for a second time about eight months ago, the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) will seek a two-year extension for constructing a river port in Bera upazila of Pabna.

Under the project initiated by the shipping ministry in July 2018, the BIWTA was supposed to have built the port and its associated facilities at a cost of Tk 513.09 crore by June 2021.

After the project was revised, the cost was raised to nearly Tk 553 crore while the competition deadline was extended to June 2022.

Once a ferry terminal, the under construction Nagarbari river port located around 100 kilometres west of Dhaka used to enable the unloading of imported goods, such as fertiliser, coal, clinker, stones, cement and food grains, brought through the waterways from Chattogram.

Truckers would then carry the goods further out, according to Md Rafikullah, president of the Nagarbari Port Traders' Association.

At least 50 to 60 goods-laden lighter vessels would dock here every day with trade amounting to anywhere between Tk 20 crore to Tk 30 crore, he said.



Under the project initiated by the shipping ministry in July 2018, the BIWTA was supposed to have built the port and its associated facilities at a cost of Tk 513.09 crore by June 2021.

Md Arman, a representative of Nawapara Group, said they used to unload imported fertiliser at Nagarbari port before transporting it to north Bengal.

"However, the port's construction prompted the shift to Nawapara ghat in Jashore," he added.

But this has raised transportation costs anywhere from Tk 5,000 to Tk 10,000, said Md Rajib, an employee of Desh Trading.

A technical team of the BIWTA is working to revise the project cost and seek a two-year extension, said Md Nazimuddin Pathan, executive engineer of the BIWTA and project director of Nagarbari river port.

He claimed that the delay had occurred over land acquisition, pandemic lockdowns, rise in raw material costs and higher flow of the Brahmaputra river.

He also claimed that 60 per cent of the construction work has been completed.

The project includes constructing a jetty, offices, warehouses, associated roads, parking lot and a substation as well as fortification from river erosion and setting up a mobile crane.

Once complete, the port will be able to unload 10 big ships each day, said Md Wakil, an officer of Nagarbari port.



Little progress is visible over the construction of the Nagarbari river port in Pabna's Bera upazila although an official of the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority said 60 per cent of the work was complete. The project includes constructing a jetty, offices, warehouses, associated roads, parking lot and a substation, fortification from river erosion and setting up a mobile crane. The photos were taken at the end of last month.

PHOTO: AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU

Sugar's duty cut yet to bring any benefit to retail market

MOHAMMAD SUMAN and SUKANTA HALDER

Consumers in Bangladesh are still paying higher prices for sugar although a week has passed since the National Board of Revenue (NBR) removed the import duty on both raw and refined sweetener.

On February 26, the customs authority withdrew Tk 3,000 specific duty on the import of a tonne of raw sugar and Tk 6,000 on refined sugar with immediate effect. It also cut the regulatory duty to 25 per cent from 30 per cent.

But consumers, who are already struggling to make ends meet owing to the cost-of-living crisis, are yet to receive some respite from the high price of sugar, one of the key commodities used for preparing sweetened items, tea, biscuits, and confectionery.

Loose sugar has been retailed at Tk 115 to Tk 120 per kilogramme over the last two months while packaged sugar is hardly available in the kitchen market in the two largest cities of the country: Dhaka and Chattogram. Price data of the state-run Trading Corporation of Bangladesh also showed a similar price trend.

The government fixed the prices of loose and packaged sugar at Tk 107 and Tk 112 per kg, respectively, on February 1.

Yesterday, Nurul Alam Shikdar, a retailer in the Pallabi extension area of the capital, said he was selling loose sugar at Tk 120 per kg as he had not received sugar from the dealer since the reduction of the import duty.

Yusuf Ali, another retailer in Karwan

Bazar, one of the biggest kitchen markets in Dhaka, was selling the item at Tk 115 per kg.

"Buyers are not buying sugar at Tk 120. So, I have cut the price."

Most of the retailers in Karwan Bazar claimed that they are getting half the sugar they have sought from dealers. Retailers in the port city have also made similar observations.

The price of a 50-kg sugar sack, however, has dropped by Tk 40 to Tk 50 in the wholesale market in the past one week.

Sugar was sold at Tk 3,950 per maund yesterday from Tk 4,000 earlier, according to Abul Hashem, a wholesaler at Moulvibazar in Old Dhaka in the capital.

He also claimed that he was not getting 30-40 per cent of the sweetener he had ordered.

Taslim Shahriar, senior assistant general manager at the Meghna Group of Industries, one of the country's biggest commodity importers and processors, claimed dealers and wholesalers were now buying less sugar due to the losses they incurred earlier.

He said: "The sugar that we currently have has been imported by paying customs duty at the previously fixed rate. It will take some time for the new sugar to hit the market."

He hopes that the price of the product will go down by the end of this week.

Shahriar pointed out that the price of sugar in the international market was becoming unstable again.

"Sugar production in India starts in October and in Brazil from March. The prices of Brazilian sugar are going up every day. It will have an impact on the price level in Bangladesh."

More than two dozen mills in India's top sugar-producing state of Maharashtra had stopped cane crushing by the end of February, nearly two months earlier than last year, due to adverse weather, according to Reuters.

"The duty must be zero. Otherwise, there will be no major impact on the price in the market," said Golam Mostafa, chairman of Deshbandhu Group, which operates a sugar refinery.

SM Nazar Hossain, vice-president of the Consumers' Association Bangladesh, said the gas crisis, the volatility in the international market and higher import duty-refiners are cited as the factors behind the price hike.

"Their problems never end. They don't think of the consumer's side fairly."

"Only the companies will benefit if any duty exemption is given without beefing up market monitoring."

Businesses imported 3.28 lakh tonnes of raw sugar worth Tk 1,632 crore and 13,925 tonnes of refined sugar worth Tk 87.11 crore from January to February, according to data from the NBR.

Importers paid Tk 953.49 crore for raw sugar and Tk 55.03 crore for refined sugar in the form of duties.

This means the import cost of raw sugar, including the import duty, is Tk 69.79 per kg and that of refined sugar cost is Tk 102.07.

Women's rise to the top: the invisible barriers

MAMUN RASHID

With the exception of a few, gender inequality has plagued society for centuries, with women being consistently denied access to positions of true power and influence. There have always been the more obvious and visible barriers which we are well aware of, but much more powerful and troublesome are the invisible barriers that have systematically held back qualified women from reaching the highest levels of leadership.

In the case of Bangladesh, the preconceived notions, and biases regarding traditional gender roles and stereotypes appear to be even more deeply ingrained in the culture and this can make it much more challenging for women to break into leadership positions, especially in the workplace.

It is unfortunate but also quite clear that many people still believe that women should prioritise family responsibilities over their careers and that men are supposedly better suited for leadership roles.

Despite legal protections against discrimination, women in Bangladesh and across the globe still face prejudice and discrimination in the workplace and it is those "not so obvious" and hidden societal and cultural barriers that are most operative in holding women back.

One highly prevalent example of this at the workplace is when qualified women are often passed over for promotions or even paid less than similar male colleagues for doing the same work, due to the false perception that women are less competent or less committed.

Women in our society are often automatically subjected to a greater share of caregiving responsibilities at home, which can make it difficult to balance work and family responsibilities.

Even though well-intentioned but this unconscious bias of line managers or leaders hoping to "facilitate" their female colleagues' duties at home also become the reason for not giving them more responsibilities at the workplace. Without having greater responsibilities and being engaged in real leadership roles, it will be much more difficult to create women leaders.

In a more traditional society such as Bangladesh, when a female professional is career-driven, she may also be seen as being aggressive and over-ambitious, not just by her professional peers but even by her own family. For example, a wealthy husband may fail to understand why his wife has to work so hard and the same could happen with a rich father who can't see any reason why his daughter needs to have a professional career.

Traditional diversity and inclusion initiatives are not enough to address the hidden barriers as they fail to deal with the systemic issues that underlie them. Investigation and understanding of the deeper and more psychological barriers that negatively impact women are required and then new ways of training and education, especially geared towards top-level leaders of organisations, need to be developed.

Such training sessions may be designed to help senior management let go of traditional ways of thinking and let them be more empathetic towards the struggles and barriers that women face.

Business enterprises have to redesign and re-learn the way of working to not only fully support work-life balance but also address the underlying problems by rethinking performance evaluations and addressing systemic issues that impact women's ability to rise up.

Tides seem to be slowly turning and an era of female empowerment and representation is on the horizon. From the boardroom to the political arena, women are increasingly breaking the barriers and shattering stereotypes, proving that they are just as capable and deserving of success as their male counterparts.

However, overcoming the unseen barriers that hold women back from top leadership positions requires a holistic approach that addresses the root causes of gender bias and inequality in the family, society and workplace.

The author is an economic analyst



Another local firm gains top green factory certification

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

NHT Fashions Ltd, a concern of Pacific Jeans Group, has got recognition for establishing green factory thanks to its efforts to continue improving.

The Chattogram-based factory aced platinum Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) recertification early this month, upgrading from gold certification it secured in 2017, according to Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

NHT Fashions scored 84 in the latest assessment by the United States Green Building Council, up from the previous score of 64.

With the latest one, Bangladesh becomes the home of 66 LEED-certified platinum factories, where most of them are green garment factories.

The recertification and upgrading reflect the entrepreneurs' commitment to sustainability and continuous development, said BGMEA Director Md Mohiuddin Rubel.

"This is an example of Bangladesh, not only Pacific Jeans. Our entrepreneurs are conscious and doing better now," he said.

"We have to take care of the environment in the long term. We have a commitment to sustainability, water saving and power saving to sustain in the competition."

Because the buyers also follow who are keeping the environment safe while working and where the products are made, he said.

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Workers fill sacks with wheat at the market yard of the Agriculture Product Marketing Committee (APMC) on the outskirts of Ahmedabad, India on May 16, 2022.

PHOTO: REUTERS/FILE

India's wheat output dented by heatwave

REUTERS, India

A heatwave in northern and central India at a time the crop is ripening is threatening to damage grains and dent the country's wheat production for the second straight year.

The reduction in production amid a drop in inventories to the lowest level in 6 years may force the world's second biggest producer of the grain to allow imports after banning exports last year.

"Winter hasn't ended yet, but during the day temperatures rise like summer," said Rameshwar Chowdhury, who has planted wheat on six acres in the Niwai village in the northwestern state of Rajasthan.

"We are irrigating fields to limit the impact, but beyond that we can't do anything."

The maximum temperature in some

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