



Sinohydro flouting duty-free import rules

The Chinese company selling construction materials imported for Padma bridge project; NBR turns a blind eye

MOHAMMAD SUMAN

Chinese state-owned company Sinohydro Corporation Limited imported equipment, vehicles and accessories worth about \$103 million or Tk 1,145 crore in the last nine years under duty-waiver facility. The condition was that the company will not sell or hand over the goods to anyone in Bangladesh without permission from the National Board of Revenue.

The NBR had allowed imports of these machinery under the River Training Works, a sub-project of the Padma bridge project. The products were brought in 1,810 shipments -- 1,171 for the company's own use and the rest 339 consignments on condition that the goods must be re-exported.

But an investigation by The Daily Star has found that Sinohydro has not taken back a single product in the last nine years. Instead, the company has sold, and is still selling, many of these construction materials and heavy machinery in Bangladesh in violation of import rules.

Through the sales in the local market, the company is making a lot of money while evading taxes and import duties. There is no official figure available.

The duty rates of these imported goods range from 25 percent to 64 percent of the import value.

Under customs rules, the company can be fined between 200 percent and 400 percent of the evaded revenue for misusing the duty-free import facility.

But multiple officials confirmed that neither the NBR nor the customs authorities have taken any step against the company.

BONANZA FOR SINOHYDRO

In response to an application by Sinohydro, the NBR in December 2014



approved the imports of 480 types of goods on 12 conditions, including re-export, documents show.

The products include dump trucks, forklifts, diesel engine, concrete mixing trucks, cable, submersible pumps, generators, truck cranes, loaders, bulldozers, road rollers, excavators, mixing plants, cylinders, steel pipes, draggers and rubber pipes.

According to the documents, most of the goods came from China, although some came from Pakistan, Hong Kong and the Netherlands.

Weighing about 41,776 tonnes, their import value stood at \$10,30,47,620, customs documents show.

However, no information about the re-export was found on the NBR server under the name of the company, officials said, requesting anonymity given the sensitivity of the matter.

Our investigation shows the company has already sold many of these products, while sales of many other products are currently underway.

On November 24, The Daily Star visited the yard of Sinohydro Corporation in the Padma bridge project area in Jazira, and found the yard abuzz with potential customers.

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Every year, many girls are trafficked out of Bangladesh with the promise of a better life abroad, only to end up in the underbelly of cities like Mumbai and Pune, India. An investigation by The Daily Star takes a look into this dark world that involves brokers and law enforcers on both sides of the border. This is the second part of a four-part series.

SEX TRAFFICKING

The racket on prowl at the border

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN in Dhaka and SHIREYA RAMAN in Mumbai

Adjacent to the border in Narail district's Maheshpur upazila, a hidden racket facilitating the illegal crossing of people thrives, operated by individuals known locally as "Dhurs" or carriers.

During the journey, The Daily Star managed to gain access to a dozen traffickers operating within the upazila.

These traffickers have turned Matila village into a hub for trafficking people, using border points like Rajkol, Pulia, Raoungat, and Bhovodashtpur for trafficking. The carriers reveal that between 20 to 40 people, men, and women alike, are trafficked daily.

One of the leaders of these carriers with whom these correspondents spoke shared that their operations now primarily revolve around the Kule-Pachpitola and Anduli border points, while another entryway, Daulatpur, also remains open and unguarded.

The man was talking at the Jadabpur border point in Maheshpur Upazila.

The carriers demand payment ranging from Tk 5,000 to Tk 6,000 per person for facilitating illegal border crossings. The earnings



- » Brokers, locally known as "Dhurs", are a vital cog in the machine
- » Jhenaidah border is one of the most porous for trafficking
- » Sylhet and Brahmanbaria are two new routes for trafficking to India
- » Traffickers have transport, temporary lodging arrangements for the victims

fluctuate depending on the level of border security and the prevailing circumstances.

The carrier network operates with a chilling precision. Travellers seeking illegal entry are temporarily housed in border area residences for a day or two until the carriers receive a signal that the border is safe to

cross. Under the cover of midnight or the early hours of the night, the travellers are quietly transferred to the other side of the border.

When asked how they managed to conceal these unknown individuals in border houses, the Dhur leader divulged a shrewd tactic. They pose the travellers as their relatives when questioned by law enforcement officials or local residents. To avail sanctuary in the border houses and access the perilous journey, travellers must pay a steep fee of Tk 2,000 per night, inclusive of food.

On why he chose this trade, the Dhur leader explains, "We barely earned Tk 300 for a day's work in the past doing menial job, but this enterprise yields no less than Tk 20,000 in a single night."

The repercussions of challenging the carriers are so severe, that no one dares to raise their voice. Those who attempt to confront them are ensnared in legal traps; phensedyl bottles are planted near their homes, leading to police raids and set-ups.

The Dhur leader said they provide a cut of the gains to on-duty police and BGB officials. Even when carriers face arrests, they miraculously secure bail within a day, aided by a group of lawyers.

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Farm workers dry Aman paddy in the sun at a rice processing mill, locally called "Chatal", in Khulna's Dumuria upazila. Millers are buying the paddy from farmers in and around Khulna for Tk 1,100 a maund. The paddy is boiled, dried, and husked to produce rice. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

'BNP has no right to do politics'

Hasina says the party 'burns, kills people'

UNB, Barishal

Terming the BNP a terrorist party, Awami league President Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the party has no right to do politics because it "burns and kills people".

Addressing a campaign rally at the Barishal city's Bangabandhu Udyan, the AL chief said her party will strive to build a better future for the youth.

The prime minister urged the first-time voters to cast their ballots for "boat", her party's electoral symbol.

Hasina said the AL believes in the power of the youth.

Her younger sister Sheikh Rehana was seated on the dais as she spoke to the cheering crowd.

The PM said the politics of the AL is only for the welfare of the people, but the politics of the



BNP-Jamaat is to "burn people".

"While we develop the country for the people, the BNP-Jamaat unleash arson attacks," she said.

In this connection, the premier mentioned the recent arson attacks on trains that left a number of people dead.

Condemning those attacks, the AL president said the BNP-Jamaat carried out such arson attacks in

2001, 2013, and 2014.

Hasina said the BNP-Jamaat wants to foil the national polls.

The AL chief sought votes for "boat" so that her party can serve the people again. She urged all to go to the polling centres early in the morning of January 7.

She said Bangladesh earned independence as people voted for "boat" in 1970.

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35 hurt in clash at AL rally venue

1 dies after 'falling sick' during the Barishal violence; two AL leaders trade blame

STAR REPORT

A 55-year-old man died and at least 35 others were injured as supporters of two Awami League leaders clashed at the party's rally venue in Barishal city yesterday afternoon.

The clash broke out around 2:45pm at Bangabandhu Udyan, roughly 15 minutes before Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina reached there to address the rally.

Supporters of AL leader Pankaj Nath, who is running for parliament as an independent in Barishal-4, and AL nominee Shammil Ahmed, whose candidacy got cancelled, engaged in the clash.

The man who died was local Krishak League leader Siraj Shikdar.

Mohammad Hannan, a supporter of Shammil, said Siraj felt unwell during the clash and fell to the ground.

"He is my neighbour and I took him to the hospital," he said, adding that Siraj was pronounced dead when he was taken to Barishal Sher-E-Bangla Medical College Hospital.

Siraj did not suffer any injury, he added.

Barishal Metropolitan Police Commissioner Jehadul Kabir said Siraj got stuck in the middle of chaos and he

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Campaigns wrapped in pollution

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Workplace deaths see 48pc rise in 2023

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Embankment collapses amid construction

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A 'free ride' to woo voters

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Independents giving Shambhu a run for his money

