



Piled-up containers in the Chattogram port are slowing down goods' discharge from vessels, increasing their stay time, officials said.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

# Ctg port still reeling from container congestion

DWAIPAYAN BARUA, Ctg

Chattogram port is still suffering from container congestion although delivery of imported goods gained significant pace in the last three days after the relaxation of curfew and resumption of broadband internet.

Delivery from yards came almost to a halt for countrywide unrest for five days to July 22, when the port was choked with 42,150 TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent units) of containers, occupying over 79 percent of its storage capacity of 53,118 TEUs.

The situation started improving from the next day and on July 25 around 5,500 TEUs got delivered, bringing the number of stored containers to below 40,000 TEUs.

Although 3,500 TEUs were released on Friday, the port's struggle for release of containers and cargoes intensified when an increased number of vehicles of importers and prime movers crowded the yard to take delivery of their goods.

Piled-up containers are slowing down goods' discharge from vessels, which is also raising the ships' stay time, said Nazmul Haque, executive director of Saif Powertec, the berth operator of the New Mooring Container Terminal (NCT), the biggest of the three

terminals of Chattogram port.

The containers are usually kept in three to at best four layers in the yards, but the last week's crisis pushed the operators to stake them in five layers in most areas, he said.

The problem arises when one comes to take out a container from the bottom layer, the official said.

The operator has to lift all the four upper containers at first to bring out the lowest one and then place the top four to their earlier spot again, which is completely an unproductive and time-killing work, he said.

The yard's functioning equipment like rubber-tyred gantry cranes and others are also taking extra pressure and many are breaking down, he said.

The release of goods is slow now, as Klarion Designs could take delivery of some 90 TEUs out of their 120 TEUs, which reached the port last week, said Ataullah Siddique, managing director of the Chattogram-based garment factory.

Moreover, the covered van owners are charging higher fares amid a shortage of goods-carrying vehicles, he said.

Container congestion is causing longer than usual stay time and delayed sailing of the

ships, said an importer.

SITCL Qiuming, a vessel, berthed at a jetty of the NCT on July 23 carrying around 1,500 TEUs of import containers, said an official of the berth operating firm.

It took a day and a half for the vessel to get go-ahead from the customs and port to unload goods due to the lack of smooth internet, the official said.

The vessel, which was scheduled to sail out yesterday, needs one more day to complete the unloading and loading of around 1,500 TEUs of export and empty containers, he said.

Another vessel, MV Increase, berthed at another jetty of the NCT on July 22.

Usually, vessels like MV Increase leave within 48 hours after completing unloading and loading, but this time it took five days and it left yesterday.

Nazmul Haque of Saif Powertec assumes it would take one or two more weeks to get rid of the huge pile of containers.

The port officials are working hard to keep the port running and the situation would improve in a few days if container delivery keeps going at the present pace, said Md Omar Faruk, secretary of the Chittagong Port Authority.

# Food delivery hit hard by internet disruption

MAHMUDUL HASAN

Bangladesh's burgeoning online food delivery sector has been severely hit by the internet disruptions, bringing operations of the platforms to a near halt.

This affected the livelihoods of delivery riders, small and medium restaurants and home-based chefs.

Although broadband internet has been reinstated, the absence of mobile internet, essential for riders to receive orders, has been a major impediment to the services becoming fully operational.

The platforms were closed for six days, from July 18 to July 23, when Bangladesh experienced a complete internet blackout. On reopening, the businesses operated for limited hours due to a curfew.

Insiders said the sector is facing significant revenue losses every day.

According to Fahim Ahmed, chief executive officer of Pathao, a food delivery platform, the sector's daily transactions amount to Tk 6 crore on an average day.

"Despite resuming operations, restaurants are operating for fewer hours, and certain establishments remain closed," Ahmed said.

"As mobile internet is still unavailable to delivery personnel, we are working with restaurants to ensure that their broadband networks are accessible," he said.

So far, more than 50 percent of restaurants onboarded with Pathao are still closed and 65 percent of the riders have not returned to work as of last Friday.

On Friday, despite it being a weekend, the volume of orders recovered by less than 50 percent.

Industry experts said mobile internet is essential for smooth food delivery as it enables real-time order placement, tracking, and communication between customers, delivery riders and restaurants.

It ensures efficient route navigation, timely updates and quick problem resolution, enhancing overall service reliability and customer satisfaction.

Without mobile internet, food delivery

platforms relying solely on broadband would face delays, limited rider mobility, and communication issues, leading to inefficiencies.

Following widespread protest over quota reforms in public jobs, the government shut down mobile internet on July 18.

Since then, delivery personnel have been left out of their means of an income. Many left Dhaka for their hometowns.

A Hussain, a rider for foodpanda Bangladesh, said he left for his hometown in Dinajpur a week earlier.

"I am facing financial issues as it was a significant part of my income," said Hussain, a part-time delivery person.

Those who relied on food delivery as a full-time income were more severely hit.

Mojibur Rahman, who works full-time delivering processed and frozen food for an F-commerce page, said his family has fallen into a financial crisis since the internet blackout started.

"My daily average income was Tk 900 to Tk 1,000. One week without the internet has left me without money," he said.

"On Friday, my wife was sick, and I had only Tk 10 in my pocket. I had to borrow Tk 1,400 to take her to the doctor," he said.

On Saturday, he earned some money delivering only three orders.

Like any other internet and app-based service provider, foodpanda Bangladesh, the top delivery platform garnering the highest demand, has also seen its business being impacted due to the nationwide internet shutdown for almost a week.

As broadband connectivity has been restored, foodpanda Bangladesh has gradually resumed its food and grocery delivery services in some areas.

"Now we have been running our operations partially. Unless mobile data is back, it would be very difficult to run operations smoothly," said Zubair Siddiky, managing director at foodpanda Bangladesh.

"We hope that the internet service will be restored soon," he added.



Food delivery services cannot become fully operational due to the absence of mobile internet. The photo was taken from Baily Road yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

# Diesel sales jump as curfew eases

MD NAZRUL ISLAM, Chattogram

As traffic movement on highways resumed following the relaxation of the nationwide curfew imposed by the government, fuel transportation from depots to filling stations started in full swing on Wednesday.

Although fuel sales decreased 89.3 percent in the first four days of the past week, sales of diesel jumped to almost twice the usual daily demand on Wednesday and Thursday.

Of all the fuel used in Bangladesh, around 70 percent of the requirement is met by diesel.

However, sales of fuel returned to a normal level on Saturday, said officials concerned.

According to leaders of the Bangladesh Petrol Pump Owners Association (BPPOA), owners of filling stations faced several problems due to a delay in submitting pay orders because of shortened banking hours during the curfew.

Many were unable to collect fuel as they were unable to deposit money, they said.

Additionally, traders were also worried about the safe passage of fuel-laden tankers from depots to filling stations.

According to Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) officials, there is a sufficient stock of fuel in depots.

As per BPC data, Bangladesh has a daily demand of 15,000 tonnes of diesel on average while the daily demand for octane and petrol is around 4,000 tonnes each.

Due to the volatile situation across the country and the announcement of general holidays from July 20-24, the activities of 27 depots under the control of BPC were halted. Consequently, fuel sales reduced by about 89.3 percent.

However, since Wednesday, fuel sales have recovered, with sales of diesel witnessing a significant increase.

BPC officials said about 30,000 tonnes of diesel, 3,000 tonnes of petrol, and 1,900 tonnes of octane were sold across the country on Wednesday.

Similarly, 29,500 tonnes of diesel, 2,200 tonnes of octane, 2,900 tonnes of petrol, 7,000 tonnes of furnace oil and 1,200 tonnes of jet fuel were sold on Thursday.

It is mentionable that the daily demand for furnace oil on a usual day is around 2,500 tonnes.

BPC Chairman Aminul Ahsan told The Daily Star that the supply of jet fuel to the four airports of the country was normal during the curfew.

On the other hand, BPPOA Secretary General Nazmul Haque claimed that the highways were not yet safe for fuel transportation.

He told The Daily Star that as fuel is extremely flammable, there are safety concerns regarding the transportation of fuel.

"I have demanded the BPC authority to deploy security personnel for the transportation of fuel tankers, similar to that of railway wagons," he said.

# Shop owners will need a lot of time to recover from losses

Says president of the owners' association



## WEEKLY INTERVIEW

SUKANTA HALDER

The students' movement for reforming the quota system in public jobs and the subsequent violence and curfew have adversely affected businesses, said Helal Uddin, president of Bangladesh Shop Owners Association.

It will take businesses a lot of time to recover, he said during an interview with The Daily Star over the phone yesterday.

Shops and shopping centres reopened on July 24 after four days of curfew but they hardly saw any sales, he said.

People have been suffering from high inflationary pressure for a long time and the present situation compounded their woes, said Helal.

The scenario necessitates people to give a lot of thought when making any purchase and limit themselves to availing just the bare necessities, he added.

Annual average inflation in Bangladesh surged to its highest level in 12 years in the just concluded fiscal year despite easing in June, reflecting persistent erosion of real income and deterioration of living standards of low-income groups.

Annual inflation rose to 9.73 percent in fiscal year 2023-24, the highest since fiscal year 2011-12 when it was 10.62 percent, overshooting the government's target of limiting it to 7.5 percent, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

Although there were breaks for a couple of hours every day during the curfew, people are not leaving their homes if it is not absolutely necessary, said Helal.

"There was no business for 10-12 days. Many businesses will struggle to pay shop rent and staff salaries at the end of this month," he said.



The president of the shop owners' association said the government relaxed the curfew so that businesses could run their trade at least from morning till afternoon but there were barely any shoppers.

"As a result, there is growing concern among traders over how they would be able to run their businesses. If they end up being forced to take loans from banks, how will they repay the loans?" he asked.

Students launched the quota reform movement on July 1 citing that it discriminated against general students

seeking to secure public jobs.

The demonstrators started to stage sit-ins on the roads at different areas blocking traffic since July 15 and law enforcers later tried to disperse them by force, causing the movement to turn chaotic and violent.

The government imposed the curfew for an indefinite period from midnight of July 19 and deployed the armed forces to contain violence.

The curfew was relaxed every day – for two hours on Saturday and Sunday, three hours on Monday and four hours

on Tuesday. During this time, only shops selling essential food commodities stayed open. The curfew was relaxed for seven hours starting 10:00am on Wednesday and all types of shops opened for business in the morning.

It has been tough doing business over the past six months and it was even tougher for the traders to survive, said Helal.

"Our backs are against the wall. We demanded that the government take appropriate measures to bring relief to the lives of common people as soon as possible," he added.

"Because people are still gripped by a kind of fear. Shops and shopping centres will not return to normalcy until this is addressed," he said.



Many businesses will struggle to pay shop rent and staff salaries at the end of this month, said Helal Uddin, president of Bangladesh Shop Owners Association. The photo was taken from Baily Road yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN