

Inbound vessels struggle to berth at Ctg port

Port users blame delayed departures amid container backlog

DWAIPAYAN BARUA, *Chattogram*

A long queue of inbound vessels has formed at the outer anchorage of Chattogram port as sufficient berths are unavailable due to delays in scheduled departures caused by disruptions in container movement late last week.

Operators of prime movers, which are vehicles used for transporting import-export containers, had abstained from work for more than three days due to a dispute with security personnel at Chattogram DC Park in Sitakunda upazila.

And although cargo movement resumed on Friday night, the acute backlog of containers in port yards and private inland container depots (ICDs) may persist for another two weeks or more, according to port users.

The three-day stalemate delayed the scheduled departure of at least six vessels, with each extending their stay by one to four days in hopes of securing their previously allotted containers.

However, four of these vessels left the port with less than their anticipated load as 1,900 twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs), comprising 900 TEUs of export containers and 1,000 TEUs of empty containers, were left behind.

And since these vessels had to stay additional days at the port jetties, berthing delays occurred for other incoming vessels.

As of yesterday morning, a total of 14 vessels seeking berths were waiting at the outer anchorage of the port.

When transport workers began their strike on February 5, only three vessels were awaiting berths. But with delays lasting between one and three days, other vessels added to their numbers.

Berth operators assume that some of

KEYPOINTS

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| Three-day transport stalemate causes long queue of vessels | Vehicle owners plan fresh 48-hour strike | Six vessels face departure delays of up to four days | Four ships left port without unloading 1,900 containers |
| As of yesterday, 13 container vessels were waiting for berths | Berthing delays worsen as container yards remain packed with imports | Chattogram port's two busiest terminals are 80% occupied | Private ICDs struggling as export container volume doubles to 14,000 TEUs |



IMPACT

Container backlog at port and ICDs may take over two weeks to clear

Clearing the backlog may take 15 days, warn industry officials

these inbound vessels may have to wait even longer since some of the outbound vessels have extended their stay to collect the allotted load.

Besides, import, export, and empty containers have piled up at port yards and ICDs amid the halt in cargo movement.

The port's busiest terminals – New Mooring Container Terminal and Chittagong Container Terminal – have reached 80 percent of their full capacity of 26,000 TEUs.

Nazmul Haque, executive director of Saif Powertec Limited, which operates the two terminals, said the backlog began because no containers were transferred to

and from ICDs during the three-day strike.

He added that on average, more than 2,500 TEUs of import containers are delivered or transferred to ICDs each day. And while this did not happen during the three-day period, another 3,000 TEUs had arrived at the time.

Haque also said at least 40 percent of the port's yard space must be kept empty to ensure smooth operations. And considering the situation, he fears it may take two weeks to clear the backlog.

Likewise, ICDs are struggling to clear the backlog, with 19 that handle import-export containers currently holding double their full capacity.

These 19 ICDs usually accommodate 7,000 to 8,000 TEUs of export containers. But due to the three-day stalemate, the number of export-laden containers they now hold has reached 14,000 TEUs.

Ruhul Amin Sikder, secretary general of the Bangladesh Inland Container Depots Association, said they were still occupied with 12,000 TEUs as of yesterday afternoon even though a significant volume was transported since the strike ended.

"Any sort of stalemate creates a chain effect at every stage of the supply chain, causing backlog in every facility," said Sikder, who fears that it will take another 15 days to clear the backlog.

Trump says he will announce reciprocal tariffs on many countries soon

REUTERS, *Washington*

President Donald Trump said on Friday he plans to announce reciprocal tariffs on many countries by Monday or Tuesday of next week, a major escalation of his offensive to tear up and reshape global trade relationships in the US' favor.

Trump did not identify which countries would be hit but suggested it would be a broad effort that could also help solve US budget problems.

"I'll be announcing that, next week, reciprocal trade, so that we're treated evenly with other countries," Trump said. "We don't want any more, any less."

The move would fulfill Trump's campaign promise to impose tariffs on American imports equal to rates that trading partners impose on American exports.

Trump made the announcement during a meeting with visiting Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. He said auto tariffs remained on the table amid reports that the White House was weighing potential exemptions.

The new US president has long complained about the European Union's 10% tariffs on auto imports being much higher than the US car rate of 2.5 percent. He frequently states that Europe "won't take our cars" but ships millions west across the Atlantic every year.



The US, however, enjoys a 25 percent tariff on pickup trucks, a vital source of profits for Detroit automakers General Motors, Ford and Stellantis' US operations.

In recent confirmation hearings, Trump's Commerce secretary nominee Howard Lutnick voiced concerns about India's high tariff rates, while US Trade Representative nominee Jameson Gerec discussed US complaints about Vietnam's and Brazil's tariffs and trade barriers.

The US trade-weighted average tariff rate is about 2.2 percent, according to World Trade Organization data, compared to 12 percent for India, 6.7 percent for Brazil, 5.1 percent for Vietnam and 2.7 percent for European Union countries.

Trump told Republican lawmakers of his plans during budget discussions at the White House on Thursday, three sources familiar with the plan told Reuters. Trump and top aides have said they plan to use higher tariffs on foreign imports to help pay for extending Trump's 2017 tax cuts, which independent budget analysts say could add trillions of dollars to the US debt.

Increased tariffs could offset some of that cost, though they have only accounted for about 2 percent of annual revenues in recent years.

Trump announced tariffs of 25 percent on Canada and Mexico on Saturday but delayed them after a negative reaction from investors. The two largest US trading partners agreed to increase enforcement efforts at the border, a top Trump priority.

Wall Street extended losses on Friday following the Reuters report of Trump's discussion with lawmakers.

US consumer sentiment dropped to a seven-month low in February, and attitudes soured among Republicans as households took stock of what they believe will be a surge in inflation from Trump's tariffs.

At Touch of Gold, a Hatton Garden

AFP, *Mumbai*

India's central bank cut interest rates Friday for the first time in nearly five years, as concerns over a growth slowdown in the world's fifth largest economy outweighed inflation risks.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said the benchmark repo rate, the level at which it lends to commercial banks, would be reduced by 25 basis points to 6.25 percent.

While major central banks around the world cut rates last year, with some continuing to do so, lingering inflation prevented India's from following suit.

Retail inflation in the country has cooled recently, coming in at a four-month low of 5.22 percent in December, but still remains above the central bank's medium-term target of four percent.

Easing price pressure now appears to have provided room to focus on boosting growth.

India's economy expanded much slower than expected in the September quarter, owing to sluggish manufacturing and tepid urban consumption.

It is now forecast to expand this fiscal year at its slowest pace since the Covid-19 pandemic, having grown more than eight percent last year.

RBI governor Sanjay Malhotra, in his first monetary policy review, said that inflation was "expected to further moderate in 2025-26" and that, while growth would recover from its September quarter lows, it was still "much below" last year.

"Considering the existing growth-inflation dynamics... a less restrictive monetary policy is more appropriate at the current juncture," Malhotra said.

Malhotra has taken a less hawkish approach than



PHOTO: REUTERS/FILE

A policeman stands guard at the entrance to the Reserve Bank of India headquarters in Mumbai.

his predecessor Shaktikanta Das, who hiked rates 2.5 percentage points between May 2022 and February 2023 to battle inflation.

The bank last cut them in May 2020.

The RBI's decision comes less than a week after the government unveiled sweeping income tax cuts in its annual budget, looking to put more money in the hands of consumers reeling from high food prices and weak wage growth. India's economy grew 5.4 percent in the September quarter, its worst performance in seven quarters and lower than analyst expectations of 6.5 percent.

While the reading still places India among the world's fastest growing major economies, it indicates a moderation in the breakneck pace of expansion seen for much of 2023 and 2024.

Record gold prices both boon and burden for London jewellers

AFP, *London*

In London's Hatton Garden jewellery quarter, stores have raised their iron shutters to welcome a motley crew of buyers and sellers, as the price of gold reaches record highs.

"I know that whatever they offer me first, I'm going to say no," joked Jennifer Lyle, who had come to sell an old gold bracelet and single earring, after recently losing her job.

Lyle, 30, recounted how just a day earlier she had watched a television show in which a woman who bought a gold coin in 1996 for £60 found it was now worth £550 (\$676).

"That's a good increase, isn't it?" Lyle said joyfully.

The price of gold struck 40 record highs last year as global demand reached an all-time peak of 4,974 tonnes, the World Gold Council (WGC) said in a recent annual report.

The record run has extended into 2025, with gold striking a record high close to \$2,900 an ounce on Friday.

Central banks are purchasing gold in big quantities amid geopolitical and economic uncertainty, with the precious metal regarded as a safe haven investment.

At Touch of Gold, a Hatton Garden

shop run by Naqash Anjum, gleaming gold necklaces and bracelets were on display. But for some, a jewellery item deemed affordable not long ago was now too expensive.

"This is like consistently increasing prices. What was selling well... now

can't sell well because it's become out of (someone's) budget," said Anjum.

He added there are "more people trying to sell" than buy, impacting sale volumes of jewellery with Valentine's Day fast approaching.

According to the WGC, while global



This photograph shows gold bracelets displayed in a shop window on Green Street, east London. The price of gold struck 40 record highs last year as global demand reached an all-time peak of 4,974 tonnes.

demand for jewellery dropped 11 percent in 2024, total spending jumped nine percent, reflecting the price increases.

"Would I buy gold as an investment?" asked Lyle, repeating the question posed to her by AFP.

"Yes!" she answered emphatically.

In Hatton Garden, where diamonds and precious metals have been traded since the Victorian era, pawnbrokers as well as gold dealers and designers operate alongside the jewellery stores.

Tamer Yigit said he no longer custom makes jewellery out of pure gold, instead using blue resin.

"We can no longer create models directly in gold, because it is too expensive and there's a big risk that we can't sell them," said the 50-year-old who started out in the industry as a child in Turkey.

As Yigit spoke, a customer entered his shop looking to sell a broken gold bracelet and a silver coin with a portrait of Louis XVI.

"You can't imagine the amount of allegedly gold jewellery that turns out to be alloys based on copper and other metals," said Yigit as he prepared authenticity tests on the metals.

While the results confirmed the gold was pure, the coin was found to be an alloy of zinc and copper.

TCB readies 57 lakh family cards for distribution

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) has verified, printed, and handed over 57 lakh smart family cards to local administration offices for nationwide distribution.

Additionally, the corporation has prepared 6 lakh more cards for printing and delivery later this month.

These cards are being distributed free of charge by the government.

During the tenure of the Awami League, the TCB issued one crore family cards across the country. However, questions regarding the authenticity of the cardholders arose when the interim government took office following the end of Sheikh Hasina's tenure due to the July-August mass uprising.

The state agency initiated the verification of the cards after discovering that some individuals had misused their national identity (NID) to acquire multiple cards under the same name.

As of November last year, 57 lakh cards had been updated, while 43 lakh remained unverified by local administrations, according to Md Humayun Kabir, joint director and spokesperson of the TCB.

"Updated information is needed to reduce duplication of family card beneficiaries within the same families," he said.

When one crore handwritten cards were integrated with the NID system, it was found that some individuals had used the same identity to obtain a card in Dhaka and another in their hometown.

NBR seeks proposals on VAT law

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The National Board of Revenue (NBR) on Saturday requested businesses to submit their proposals regarding value-added tax (VAT) and supplementary duty as part of its efforts to frame tax proposals for the 2025-26 fiscal year, which will begin in July.

In separate letters to trade bodies, field offices of customs and VAT, ministries, and divisions, the revenue authority urged stakeholders to provide their views and proposals on the VAT and Supplementary Duty Act 2012, VAT and SD rules, the Excise and Salt Act 1944, and notifications issued under the relevant laws and rules.

The NBR asked businesses to submit their proposals by March 6 this year.

Last week, the income tax wing sought recommendations from business and professional bodies regarding income tax-related laws to assist in framing proposals for the upcoming fiscal year.

Oil prices set for 3rd weekly fall

REUTERS, *Houston*

Oil prices finished with daily gains on Friday after new sanctions were imposed on Iran's crude exports but prices were down for the week as investors worried about US President Donald Trump's renewed trade war on China and threats of tariffs on other countries.

Brent crude futures settled at \$74.66 a barrel, up 37 cents, or 0.5 percent and poised to fall more than 2 percent this week. US West Texas Intermediate crude finished at \$71.00 a barrel, up 39 cents, or 0.55 percent.

Reports of planned tariffs from the Trump administration reined in gains following the sanctions announced on Thursday, said John Kilduff, partner at Again Capital LLC.