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BBS faces interference, staffing gaps

Taskforce says

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The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) faces persistent external interference in its data releases and a severe manpower imbalance, with district offices critically understaffed while senior officials remain concentrated in Dhaka, according to a government-formed taskforce.

"One of the most persistent challenges undermining the credibility of the BBS has been external interference in its data release processes," the Taskforce on Strengthening the BBS said in its report released yesterday.

Despite the agency's mandate to produce and disseminate official statistics, the timing and accessibility of key reports are often compromised by political sensitivities, donor dependencies, and bureaucratic oversight, stated the report.

"These delays not only erode public trust but also diminish the policy relevance of statistical outputs," it added.

The taskforce cited several examples, including the delayed release of the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) 2022 and the Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics (SVRS) 2019, which reported over-optimistic fertility rate estimates.

Similarly, the Maternal Mortality Survey (MMS) has not been continued since 2016, after its findings indicated a slower-than-expected decline in maternal mortality. In another case, 2025 inflation data were announced by government functionaries ahead of the BBS's official release, undermining the agency's authority.

The report also noted that the Bangladesh Urban Health Survey 2006 was published seven years after completion, while the donor-funded National Household Database (NHD) created confusion over ownership and data custody, reflecting broader institutional vulnerabilities that compromise the credibility of official statistics.

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Statistics not always manipulated Wahiduddin says

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Planning Adviser Professor Wahiduddin Mahmud yesterday said while there is an ongoing debate over the transparency of public statistics, allegations of manipulation are not always accurate.

"The claim that public statistics are manipulated is not always true," he said while addressing a programme organised by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Center marking World Statistics Day.

He, however, noted a longstanding tendency of successive governments to selectively disclose information that aligns with their interests, while withholding data that does not favour them.

"When statistics are released with bias, it constitutes political abuse," he said, stressing the need for the generation of unbiased data and transparent dissemination.

Mahmud underscored the importance of credible statistics not just for

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Airport fire may delay RMG, pharma production by at least two months

Manufacturers estimate losses could far exceed the value of destroyed raw materials

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Local manufacturers are scrambling for raw materials after a massive fire destroyed imported production inputs at the cargo complex of Dhaka airport on Saturday.

Of them, apparel and pharmaceutical producers face the heaviest burden.

Without the imported raw materials and intermediary goods, apparel-makers risk missing export deadlines ahead of Christmas in Western markets, one of the busiest seasons for Bangladeshi fashion exporters.

Many may have to depend on faster, but more expensive air shipments, offer discounts to compensate for delayed deliveries, and see their profit margins shrink.

In these cases, the financial losses will be more than the value of the destroyed items.

Similarly, burned pharmaceutical raw materials will force drugmakers to import them again, requiring lengthy approvals and new bank

ESTIMATED LOSSES

- Total losses estimated at nearly \$1b
- About \$10m loss reported by garment exporters
- 901 RMG factories reported losses so far
- 32 pharmas suffered damages worth about Tk 200cr
- Garment accessories sector losses already exceed Tk 23cr

Reactions

Exporters blamed lax safety measures | They demand greater safety at cargo complex | International buyers are disappointed

financing. Meanwhile, interest accrued during delayed production of life-saving medicines will add to costs.

"Overall, the affected factories will have to delay production for at least two months because of the loss of raw materials and intermediary goods at the airport," said Inamul Haq Khan, senior vice-president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

Tapan Chowdhury, managing

director of Square Pharmaceuticals Ltd, a leading domestic and export drugmaker, said raw materials and machinery worth at least Tk 8 crore were destroyed in the Dhaka airport fire.

He said it will take seven to eight months more to manufacture the drugs by importing the same raw materials again.

The cargo complex at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport

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Govt raises honorarium for recruitment, promotion activities

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The finance ministry has significantly increased the honorarium for individuals involved in the recruitment and promotion of officials in ministries, divisions, and subordinate offices, according to a circular issued yesterday.

The revised rates, effective immediately, mark the first adjustment since March 2019.

Under the new structure, the ministry has raised the number of honorarium categories for question preparation, examinations, and meals to 13 from the previous 11.

The honorarium for question paper preparation has been doubled to Tk 6,000 per person, up from Tk 3,000.

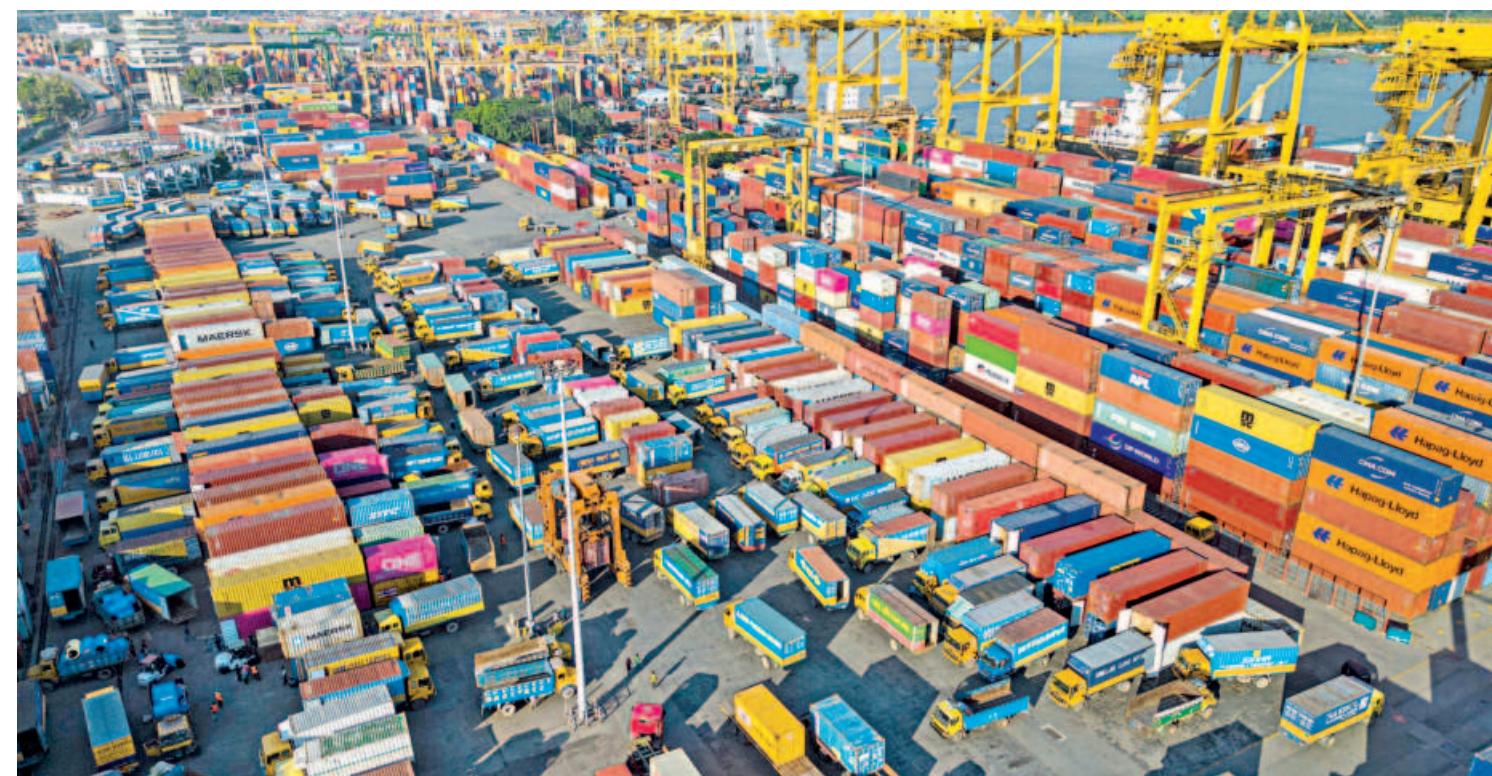
Members of departmental selection and promotion committees will now receive Tk 6,000 per meeting, while oral and practical examination board members and subject experts are entitled to the same amount per day.

The honorarium for evaluating each answer sheet has been increased to Tk 130 from Tk 120.

For fully objective-type answer sheets, the rate has been raised to Tk 35 per sheet from Tk 30.

The rates for lunch and dinner related to examination activities have risen to Tk 500 per person.

Support staff involved in examination duties will receive allowances ranging from Tk 800 to Tk 1,200, depending on their grades. Coordinators nominated by the head of the examination venue will be paid Tk 3,500, while written examination centre inspectors will receive Tk 1,800 per day.



Containers lie stacked at Chattogram port, the country's main foreign trade gateway, which is facing a severe cargo backlog following a series of wildcat strikes by transport operators.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAHMAN

Strike fallout: Backlog at Ctg port may take a week to clear

Queues of goods-carrying vehicles stretched nearly 20km yesterday

DWAIPAYAN BARUA, Ctg

The country's main foreign trade gateway is struggling with extreme cargo congestion as importers and transport operators rushed to take delivery of containers delayed during a series of wildcat transport strikes spanning multiple days.

Chattogram port users warned it could take another week to clear the accumulated backlog.

Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) Secretary Md Omar Faruk, however, said the situation would improve soon.

The rush followed Sunday evening's withdrawal of the strikes, launched by prime mover, truck, and covered van owners, and customs clearing and forwarding (C&F) staff in response to a sudden fourfold increase in port entry fees by the CPA.

The regulatory body had raised charges—later suspended—for heavy vehicles by up to 300 percent in line

with the recently revised tariff schedule.

EXPORT SHIPMENTS HIT HARD

By the early hours yesterday, queues of goods-carrying vehicles at the Chattogram port stretched nearly 20 kilometres along the Port Toll Road up to Fouzderhat, with additional gridlocks on Port Connecting Road and Airport Road.

The massive inflow of vehicles for on-chassis delivery of import containers had an immediate knock-on effect on exports. The tailback of vehicles delayed the transport of export containers, forcing vessels to depart half empty.

Two ships, MV San Lorenzo and MV Smooth Venture, left yesterday morning, leaving behind 234 TEUs of exports, while Colombo-bound vessels Santa Loukia and HR Farha deferred departure, unable to collect sufficient export cargo.

Port security officials said the backlog was created almost immediately after vehicle movements resumed, as prime mover trailers tried to avoid detention charges for delayed containers designated for on-chassis delivery.

Port sources reported that importers had submitted assignments for around 3,000 import containers over five days until Saturday, but only a handful could be delivered during the strike.

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Sources in the BSCPLC said BSNL's latest decision to stop availing the service was also prompted by financial constraints.

The BSCPLC officially began exporting 10 Gbps of bandwidth to BSNL on February 8, 2016.

However, on February 8, 2020, BSNL temporarily stopped availing the service.

It later started availing the service again on November 26, 2021, following a new agreement signed on September 7, 2021.

The service resumed with an initial capacity of 10 Gbps, which was subsequently increased to 20 Gbps.

The latest development marks yet another disruption in the service.

The bandwidth supply from Bangladesh played a crucial role for India's "Seven Sisters" region, which has remained digitally isolated compared to the country's major digital hubs such as Chennai, Hyderabad and Mumbai, mainly due to inadequate transmission facilities.

The BSCPLC provides the service through a terrestrial optical fibre link operated by Bangladesh Telecommunications Company Ltd, connecting its Cox's Bazar landing station to BSNL's Agartala node via Akhaura.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh began importing bandwidth from India in 2012 to ensure redundancy for its sole submarine cable connection and to support the country's growing bandwidth demand.

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