

# star BUSINESS



## Ctg port sets new records in container, vessel handling

DWAIPAYAN BARUA, Ctg

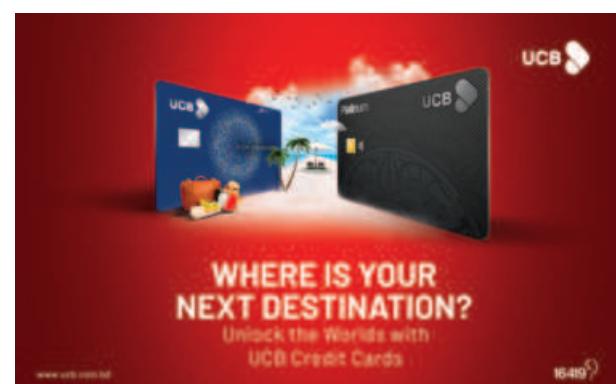
Despite several operational disruptions this year, the country's premier Chattogram port is on track to hit record highs in container, cargo, and vessel handling, reflecting growth in foreign trade as well as improved port efficiency and capacity.

Operational disruptions, including yard congestion, led to vessel queues and long waiting periods at different times. However, several reforms -- including digital transformation and expanded yard capacity -- have significantly reduced vessel waiting times, bringing them down to almost zero in the last quarter, thereby supporting continued growth.

As of December 26, the port had handled a record 33.64 lakh TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent units) of containers, the highest ever, up 2.68 percent from 32.27 lakh TEUs last year, according to Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) data.

Of this total, about 18.32 lakh TEUs were imports and 15.31 lakh TEUs were exports. Port officials expect roughly 45,000 more TEUs to be handled in the remaining days of the year.

The CPA compiled the data by counting import, export, and empty containers loaded and unloaded at the port's main jetties, the Pangaon Inland Container Terminal in Keraniganj, and the Kamalapur Inland Container Depot in Dhaka.



The port also handled a total of 13.63 crore tonnes of cargo, including containerised goods, surpassing last year's record of 12.40 crore tonnes. The total number of vessels handled reached 4,396, compared to 3,867 in 2024, also marking a record high.

### CHALLENGES AND MEASURES

Operational activities, such as cargo handling and delivery, were severely disrupted for several days in May and June due to a nationwide pen down strike by National Board of Revenue officials.

Other setbacks -- including the 10-day Eid-ul-Azha holidays in June, a weeklong customs server disruption in July, and repeated work abstentions by transport workers -- led to container build-up and a severe vessel queue that lasted until August, with waiting times exceeding 12 days at one point.

To ease congestion, the port authority gradually took measures and in August expanded the port's container storage capacity by nearly 10 percent to 59,000 TEUs by freeing up space in existing yards and using two old sheds outside the main port area.

The launch of a digital payment system for gate passes in February also began yielding results by mid-year, speeding up cargo transport.

With Chittagong Dry Dock Limited of the Bangladesh Navy taking operational charge of the New Mooring Container Terminal (NCT) in early July, container handling at NCT increased noticeably in the following months.

As a result, vessel waiting times dropped sharply from September, with zero waiting days recorded for nine days in September, 18 days in October, 19 days in November, and 20 days so far in December. Ships now often berth immediately.

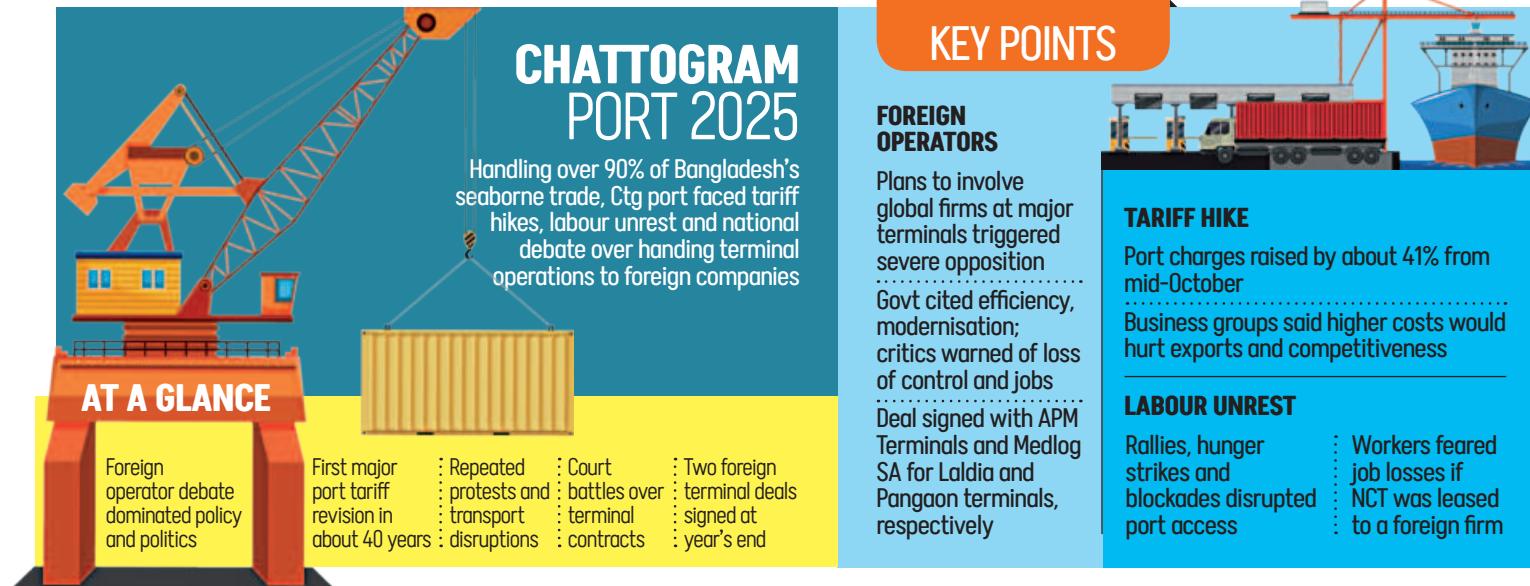
Khairul Alam Suzan, former director of the Bangladesh Shipping Agents Association, said, "The Chittagong Dry Dock authority has remarkably streamlined queues of container and cargo carrying vehicles at both the jetties and delivery points at the NCT, which has greatly improved the pace of container handling and delivery activities."

He also stressed the need to make customs operations round the clock, like port operations, for further improvement.

Commodore Ahamed Amin Abdullah, member (Harbour and Marine) of the Chittagong Port Authority, said, "This year, the port authority delivered exceptional performance, handling a historic volume of containers and cargo, driven by increased trade and expanded port capacity. Vessel waiting times were reduced to zero on many occasions, enabling berthing upon arrival and faster turnaround."

## A turbulent year for the premier seaport

Strikes, tariff resets and disputes over foreign operator appointments tested governance at Ctg port



DWAIPAYAN BARUA, Ctg

From the start to the end, Chattogram port remained in the national spotlight this year -- for protests, controversy, tariff hikes and other significant policy decisions like handing over operations of major terminals to foreign companies.

Throughout the year, political uncertainty, labour unrest and sensitive reform decisions all collided at the facility that handles more than 90 percent of the country's international trade. It barely got any breathing space for trade to bloom.

Even so, as of December 26, the port handled 33.64 lakh TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent units) containers, a 2.68 percent growth from 32.27 lakh TEUs handled last year, according to Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) data.

Meanwhile, the port handled a total of 13.63 crore tonnes of overall cargo, including the containerised ones, this year till December 27 morning, topping last year's total volume of

customs services at the port.

Protests continued on and off for weeks. Cargo clearance slowed, vessels waited longer at anchor, and yard capacity approached critical levels. Even after the strike was formally

### THE REWIND

withdrawn in late May, congestion lingered, with the port struggling to return to normalcy.

#### THE FOREIGN OPERATOR DEBATE

The NBR protest was surely a key flashpoint for the port in the outgoing year. As this protest went on, the Chattogram port unit of Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal, the workers' wing of BNP, launched a series of weeklong protest programmes, protesting the government's move to lease out the New Mooring Container Terminal (NCT) to a foreign operator.

Trade bodies reacted sharply, warning that the higher costs would erode export competitiveness, particularly for garment exporters already facing global demand pressures.

As part of the hike, the CPA raised gate pass fees for heavy vehicles more than fourfold, from Tk 57 to Tk 230. The decision prompted the Chattogram Prime Mover Owners Association to suspend container transport from October 15, causing deliveries to plunge by nearly 45 percent and rapidly building backlogs at the port.

Despite the mounting opposition, the government moved decisively at the year's end. In mid-November, it signed agreements with Denmark's APM Terminals and Switzerland-based Medlog SA for the construction and operation of the Laldia Container Terminal and the operation of the Pangaon Inland Container Terminal.

Street mobilisation followed swiftly. Rallies, torch processions and hunger strikes swept Chattogram, demanding cancellation of foreign operator agreements and reversal of tariff hikes.

Legal challenges soon followed. On November 9, the High Court stayed the tariff hike for one month, offering temporary relief to port users. Later in November, the court ordered a suspension of all activities related to the proposed foreign operator contract for the NCT, following a writ petition challenging its legality.

Meanwhile, the fate of the NCT remained unresolved. On December 4, a High Court bench delivered a dissenting verdict on the writ petition challenging the NCT contract, leaving the matter pending before the chief justice, effectively guaranteeing that the controversy will spill into 2026.

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## Rice output may rise in MY26

**USDA says on Bangladesh**

### STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh is likely to harvest more rice in the marketing year (MY) 2025-26, ending with the Aman paddy harvest, which is currently underway in the southern region, due to increased acreage and production.

The overall rice output, the country's staple crop, may rise to 3.76 crore tonnes in MY26 from 3.66 crore tonnes in MY25, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) said in its grain and feed update on Bangladesh released last week.

The USDA said Aman season rice is the last crop of MY26. Transplanted in July-August 2025, the harvest has been completed in the northern, northwestern, and central regions. The southern regions are expected to finish harvesting by the end of December 2025.

"Farmers in the northern districts of Bangladesh reported a good harvest of Aman season rice despite higher production costs," the report said.

Citing its contacts and the latest crop production data from the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), the USDA estimated Aman season rice acreage and production at 58 lakh hectares and 1.48 crore tonnes, respectively.

"Agriculture offices from various field locations reported good harvests this season," it added.

The US agency expects the cultivated area of Boro rice, the first crop of the marketing year, to remain unchanged in MY26, with production forecast at 2.05 crore tonnes.

However, it has raised Aus rice production forecasts to 23.5 lakh tonnes from 21 lakh tonnes in the previous year.

Despite higher domestic production and imports, prices of all types of rice in Bangladesh have risen.

12.40 crore tonnes, which was the highest so far.

The total number of vessels handled so far reached 4,396 compared to 3,867 in 2024.

#### EARLY-YEAR DISRUPTIONS

The year began with operational strain. In early February, container transport between the port and inland container depots was disrupted after clashes involving prime mover drivers and helpers at DC Park in the port city, temporarily halting cargo movement and exposing the fragility of last-mile logistics for days.

The interruption set an early tone for a year marked by repeated disruptions to port operations. The next month, the CPA sharply increased storage charges for containers remaining beyond the free period, introducing a fourfold hike.

Customs agents and importers warned that the move would inflate logistics costs and compound congestion rather than resolve it. The decision was widely seen as an early signal that port users would face higher charges after decades of relative stability in tariffs.

The true chaos began in the second quarter. Operational pressure intensified during April and May, when a nationwide strike by National Board of Revenue (NBR) officials -- protesting an ordinance restructuring the revenue administration -- severely affected

By June, labour and political opposition to foreign operators at Chattogram port moved into a more organised protest. On June 15, the Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal, aligned with the port workers' federation, launched a six-day protest programme opposing plans to lease the NCT to UAE-based DP World. Demonstrators argued that handing over the port's largest operational terminal would undermine national control over a strategic asset and threaten workers' jobs.

The issue became a topic of national debate, making headlines regularly. All the while, port operations continued to struggle.

The opposition was notable not only for its intensity but also for its ideological breadth. Political parties from opposing ends of the spectrum, including left-leaning groups and right-wing nationalists, raised similar objections, framing foreign terminal operations as a question of sovereignty, security and long-term national interest.

Government officials and port authorities countered that involving experienced global operators was essential to modernise port operations, reduce vessel turnaround time and handle rising trade volumes.

They repeatedly pointed to competition from ports in India, Sri Lanka and Southeast

Asia, warning that without rapid reform, Chattogram risked losing cargo to regional rivals.

Political unease over the matter continued through July, August and September, with BNP and Jamaat leaders publicly questioning whether an interim government had the mandate to sign long-term concession agreements for strategic infrastructure.

#### HIGH TARIFFS, TERMINAL DEALS, PROTESTS

October proved to be the most disruptive month of the year.

In mid-October, the CPA announced a sweeping revision of port tariffs -- the first such adjustment in about four decades -- with an average increase of around 41 percent across several charges related to container handling and storage.

Trade bodies reacted sharply, warning that the higher costs would erode export competitiveness, particularly for garment exporters already facing global demand pressures.

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PHOTO: STAR

concerns. "Compared to six or seven months ago, the real estate sector hasn't seen much improvement. Still, we believe the market will rebound," he said.

Tropical Homes showcased 25 projects for low- to upper-middle-income buyers, including the country's tallest commercial

high-rise. Prices range from Tk 30 lakh for a Tongi commercial unit to Tk 12 crore for premium projects. Residential units are priced at Tk 7,000-Tk 23,000 per square foot, with sizes up to 4,000 square feet.

Credence Housing Ltd presented 54 projects in prime Dhaka neighbourhoods such as Dhanmondi, Lalmatia, Kalabagan, Elephant Road, Siddheswari, Gulshan, Banani, and Uttara.

"Our core focus is delivering on time and earning customer trust," said Abdur Rahman Khan, team leader of Credence's planning and investment department. "We cater to mid- to high-income buyers who prioritise location and lifestyle facilities."

Most buyers rely on financing, with banks covering 70-80 percent of the property value, he added.

## REHAB fair sees weak turnout ahead of polls

### STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Attendance at this year's REHAB fair fell short of expectations, as the country's premier property exhibition ended yesterday amid a cautious mood among investors.

Developers and financiers reported fewer serious inquiries and spot loan approvals, attributing the slowdown to the political climate ahead of the national election.

However, visitor numbers rose slightly on the final day of the four-day fair, organised by the Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh at the China-Bangladesh Friendship Conference Centre in Agargaon, offering hope for post-fair engagement.

"We primarily focus on luxury projects in prime locations, which is why we don't have a very high number of projects," said Ahsan

Habib, assistant general manager and cluster head (sales) at Rangs Properties Ltd. "This year, we've showcased around 25 projects, both residential and commercial, mostly in Dhanmondi, Gulshan, Banani, Mohakhali, DOHS, Uttara, Bashundhara, and an ongoing project in Mirpur."

Footfall has been "significantly lower" than last year, he added. "People are being more cautious due to the upcoming elections and overall political uncertainty. Recent events have also made city movement more difficult."

Mid-income buyers were the most active segment, Habib said, targeting units priced between Tk 1.5 crore and Tk 2 crore, ranging from 1,300 to 2,000 square feet. Rangs' projects range from over Tk 1 crore to Tk 25-Tk 26 crore.

Mohammad Rakib Hossain, general manager (sales) at Tropical Homes Ltd, expressed similar

concerns. "Compared to six or seven months ago, the real estate sector hasn't seen much improvement. Still, we believe the market will rebound," he said.

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