



Trade bodies demand urgent fix to Ctg port deadlock

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Leaders of ten major trade bodies have demanded immediate government intervention to resolve the ongoing deadlock at Chattogram port, which handles over 90 percent of the country's maritime trade, terming it a "great disaster".

This is the first time in the country's history that all vessels have remained at a standstill at the port, they claimed in a joint statement at a press conference at the Gulshan office of the Bangladesh Textile Mills Association (BTMA) in Dhaka yesterday.

"This is not a normal strike; it is equivalent to destroying the country's heart of business and trade by creating a deadlock at Chattogram port," the statement said.

The economy suffers losses of several thousand crores of taka even from a single day's deadlock at the port, they added.

Operations at the port came to a halt after workers and employees of the seaport enforced indefinite work abstention from February 3, opposing the move by the interim government to hand over the operation of the New Mooring Container Terminal (NCT) at the port to UAE-based firm DP World.

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Goods from export and import vessels have not been loaded or unloaded for nearly a week.

The joint statement was issued by top trade bodies, including the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA), Bangladesh Textile Mills Association (BTMA), Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI), Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI), and Bangladesh Employers' Federation (BEF).

The Bangladesh Chamber of Industries, Bangladesh Garment Buying House Association, Bangladesh Garments Accessories & Packaging Manufacturers & Exporters Association (BGAPMEA) and Bangladesh Terry Towel & Linen Manufacturers & Exporters Association (BTTLMEA) also signed the statement.

The country's external trade, including the main export earner garments, has been facing irrecoverable losses due to the situation, they noted.

Exportable goods cannot be shipped, and imported goods cannot be released from vessels,

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NBR split caught in bureaucratic wrangle

BAHARAM KHAN and MD ASADUZ ZAMAN

Although the authorities published the gazette notification to split the revenue board, the implementation has yet to be completed as bureaucrats at the Secretariat are divided over staffing approval.

Revenue board officials said a new organogram seeking staffing for the new two divisions has been sent, but it is now stuck at the Ministry of Public Administration due to the standoff.

According to them, the bifurcation process may remain incomplete, as the interim government has only two working days before the February 12 polls.

The interim government aimed to divide the revenue board into policy and management divisions during its tenure. Multilateral lenders, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF), had long advocated for the split to boost revenue collection and improve transparency.

In May last year, the government issued an ordinance abolishing the National Board of Revenue (NBR) and forming two divisions. But revenue cadres protested, arguing that it would place administrative officers in top revenue posts. Facing opposition, the government issued a revised ordinance in September, allowing revenue officers to fill the senior posts in the new divisions.

On January 21, the advisory council approved the necessary amendments to the rules of business.

Usually, such amendments require clearance from the Secretaries' Committee on Administrative Development, chaired by the cabinet secretary.

But the finance ministry sent the amendments directly to the chief adviser, claiming it was not possible to convene the committee due to election-related work pressures, according to documents.

In reality, the committee met the same day at the Cabinet Division at 3 pm, said an additional secretary at the division, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"It is clear that the finance ministry

NBR BIFURCATION HITS DEADLOCK

GOAL: SPLIT NBR INTO

- Revenue Policy Division
- Revenue Management Division

CORE PROBLEM

Disagreements between the Cabinet Division and Ministry of Finance	Dispute over amending the Rules of Business
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THE DISPUTED APPROVAL

FINANCE MINISTRY CLAIMS

Secretaries' Committee couldn't meet due to election duties

Approval taken from chief adviser on Jan 29 without a committee meeting

CABINET DIVISION OFFICIAL CLAIMS

Finance ministry misled chief adviser

REVENUE POLICY AND REVENUE MANAGEMENT ORDINANCE, 2025

Ordinance issued: May 12, 2025

Revised ordinance issued: Sept 1

Rules of Business approved: Jan 21

Writ petition filed: Feb 1

WHAT TO EXPECT

Appointments and implementation unlikely under current govt

deliberately created ambiguity within the administration," the official added.

Firoz Mia, a former additional secretary of the Ministry of Public Administration, said that launching a separate institution requires approval of the staffing structure not only from the ministries of public administration and finance but also from the secretaries' committee.

"This is a very standard procedure and must be followed," he said.

He was critical of the interim government for creating "unprecedented disorder" in public administration over the past one and a half years.

"The same thing is happening now with the NBR bifurcation. If implemented, it will further increase administrative chaos in

the future," Mia added.

Abdul Awal Mazumder, writer, researcher, and former secretary, said bypassing established procedures sets a worrying precedent.

Reflecting on his five years at the Cabinet Division, he recalled that during the BNP government, even when the prime minister approved a decision bypassing the Cabinet Division, it was later annulled. "This kind of decision should not be taken at the end of a government's tenure," he added.

Asked about the Cabinet Division's claim, Secretary of the Internal Resources Division (IRD) under the finance ministry and NBR Chairman Md Abdur Rahman Khan declined to comment, saying, "Shouldn't make any comment on this sensitive matter now."

Earlier, however, Khan had told the media that the separation process would be completed by the end of the interim government's tenure.

Food grain imports surge 42% in first half of FY26

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh's food grain imports surged 42 percent year-on-year to 42 lakh tonnes in the first half of the current fiscal year (FY) owing to higher imports, particularly by the private sector.

Of the amount, 84 percent or 35 lakh tonnes were wheat, and the rest were rice brought in by the public and private sectors, according to data from the food ministry.

During the period, wheat imports by the private sector surged 31 percent year-on-year to 32.45 lakh tonnes, up from 24.69 lakh tonnes a year earlier.

Meanwhile, imports by the government dropped marginally.

Taslim Shahriar, senior assistant general manager at Meghna Group of Industries (MGI), said a decline in wheat prices in the international market has encouraged imports.

"High prices of rice also buoyed demand for wheat, as it is a substitute. Demand for wheat-based foods is growing, too. This is because people's consumption behaviour has changed," he said.

Market price data compiled by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) showed that the national average retail price of wheat flour stayed below the rates of coarse rice between November 2024 and September 2025.

Later, prices of rice declined due to higher supply from increased domestic production and imports. At the same time, retail prices of wheat flour exceeded the prices of coarse rice.

In October 2025, the national average retail price of wheat flour was Tk 54.28 per kilogramme, and the rice price was

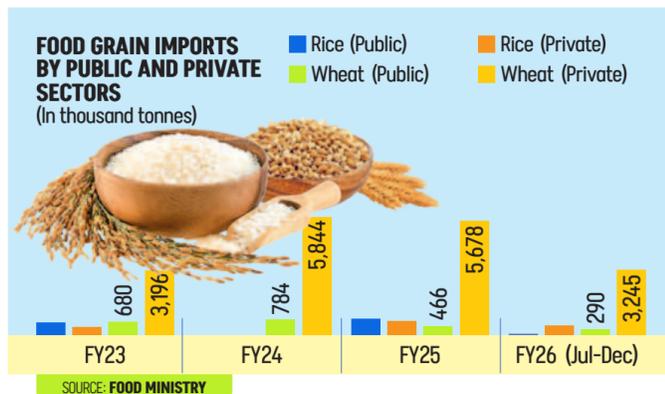
Tk 52.20 per kilogramme.

Food ministry data showed that rice imports by both the public and private sectors shot up to 6.65 lakh tonnes in the July-December period of FY2025-26 from 1.75 lakh tonnes a year ago.

The food ministry, in its latest

and the private sector was authorised to import 6 lakh tonnes of rice. Under this approval, the private sector imported nearly 4.9 lakh tonnes by November 2025, close to the scheduled target.

Recently, the government granted permission for the private sector to



Bangladesh Food Situation Report, said the government undertook initiatives to import 15 lakh tonnes of food grains, including 7 lakh tonnes of rice and 8 lakh tonnes of wheat.

This import aimed to strengthen buffer stocks, mitigate market volatility, and safeguard national food security amid global uncertainties.

The government had imported 1 lakh tonnes of rice and 3 lakh tonnes of wheat, while the remaining quantities were in the import pipeline, the report added.

To stabilise domestic supply and prices, rice import duties were reduced,

import an additional 2 lakh tonnes of rice.

The food ministry report projected that Bangladesh's total rice import during FY26 would be more than 14 lakh tonnes, almost equal to the volume of imports in the previous year.

Wheat imports, which meet over 85 percent of the country's demand, will rise to 71.75 lakh tonnes in the current FY26, registering a 17 percent year-on-year increase.

The MGI official Shahriar said the amount of wheat may be close to the projection of the food ministry.

GP profit falls to 8-year low

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The country's largest mobile operator, Grameenphone (GP), saw its profit fall 18.5 percent in 2025 to the lowest level in eight years, amid weak consumer spending and subdued purchasing power.

The company posted a profit of Tk 2,958 crore last year, down from Tk 3,631 crore in 2024.

"Over the past several quarters, we faced strong macroeconomic challenges but later saw some early signs of stabilisation," GP CEO Yasir Azman said, adding that 2025 was a recovery year for the company.

GP's revenue also fell slightly last year, with earnings dropping by Tk 39 crore from Tk 15,845 crore in 2024. It declared a 105 percent final cash dividend for 2025, bringing the total dividend for the year, including the interim payout, to 215 percent.

The company had paid a 330 percent cash dividend the previous year.

Earnings per share declined to Tk 21.90 from Tk 26.89 the previous year.

Meanwhile, in the fourth quarter of 2025, the company reported revenue of Tk 3,860 crore, a 3.3 percent year-on-year

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TK 13,447CR DISPUTE BTRC seeks legal advice as GP, Robi want arbitration

MAHMUDUL HASAN

Bangladesh's telecom regulator is seeking legal advice on arbitration proposals from the country's two largest mobile operators to resolve a dispute over Tk 13,447 crore in audit claims.

Grameenphone (GP) and Robi Axiata have formally asked the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) to consider alternative dispute resolution mechanisms to settle the cases. The regulator wants to know if there is a legal basis for it, what procedures would apply, and what the pros and cons might be.

The matter was discussed at a recent BTRC meeting, where officials reviewed a detailed working paper on the proposals. The Daily Star has obtained a summary of the document, where legal advisers suggest the path will not be easy.

ORIGIN OF THE DISPUTES

The claims date back to a 2019 BTRC audit. The regulator says the operators owe money for unpaid annual spectrum fees, value-added tax and revenue sharing.

Both companies dispute the amounts and deny evading any taxes, triggering a legal battle between them and the BTRC, with cases filed in 2019.

GP, the country's largest telecom operator, faces the larger bill. Based on an audit covering 1997 to 2014, the BTRC sent the company a demand notice in April 2019.

According to the regulator, GP owes Tk 12,579.95 crore to the government, including dues payable to the BTRC and the National Board of Revenue (NBR).

The case remains unresolved nearly six years later.

In two letters to the regulator, GP proposed arbitration as a way out. The operator pointed to the slow pace of lower court proceedings, with little hope of a quick resolution even on appeal.

It also argued that complex technical issues could be better handled by experts in an arbitration tribunal.

The company has asked the BTRC to define the scope, process and conditions for arbitration.

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