Textile, jute industries need practical solutions

Says state minister

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The challenges facing the textile and jute industries must be identified and addressed with practical measures to increase production and create jobs, Md Shariful Alam, state minister for textiles and jute, said yesterday.

He made the remarks during visits to state-owned industrial units -- Amin Jute Mills Ltd and Asiatic Cotton Mills Ltd -- in Chattogram, where he reviewed their overall operations, infrastructure, production capacity and scope for development.

"Jute is Bangladesh's traditional cash crop. As an eco-friendly natural fibre, it holds a special place in the global market," he said.

He added that the textile sector also plays a vital role in industrialisation, export earnings and job creation. Both sectors have significant potential that needs to be tapped by strengthening local industries and helping them compete in the market.

"Bangladesh's textile and jute industries have a long history and huge potential. To realise this potential, we must make proper use of the infrastructure, workforce and production capacity of existing mills," Shariful said.

He stressed the need to adopt modern technology, improve production systems and use existing resources efficiently to develop the industries. Assessing the actual condition of the mills and taking appropriate steps could also speed up their development, he added.



PHOTO: MINISTRY OF TEXTILES & JUTE

Md Shariful Alam, state minister for textiles and jute, visits Amin Jute Mills Ltd in Chattogram yesterday to review its operations and production capacity, stressing the need to modernise state-owned mills, boost output and create jobs.

The state minister said one of the government's main goals was to make proper use of state-owned industrial assets, expand production and create new jobs.

Among those present during the visits were Brig Gen Md Kabir Uddin Sikder, chairman of the Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation, and Brig Gen SM Zahid Hassan, chairman of the Bangladesh Textile Mills Corporation, along with other officials concerned.

Fisheries department proposes Tk 47cr project for 29 baors

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Department of Fisheries (DoF) has proposed a Tk 47.55 crore project to develop fisheries resources in 29 baors across four south-western districts, increase fish production and improve the livelihoods of genuine fishers.

The five-year project, titled "Community-Based Fisheries Resource Management in Selected Baor Areas", includes excavating baors, establishing fish sanctuaries, upgrading fingerling production facilities, and strengthening training and community-based management.

Baors are crescent-shaped water bodies formed when a river changes course, leaving behind an isolated section of its former channel.

A press release issued yesterday by the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock said the project aims to increase fish production in the baors of Jashore, Jhenaidah, Chuadanga and Kushtia by at least 10 percent.

The project was initiated by the Jashore deputy commissioner last year. The proposal was subsequently forwarded to the Planning Commission after the government approved its staffing structure.

It is now awaiting an assessment of its costs and activities, according to the release.

Md Delwar Hossain, secretary of the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock, said the project aims not only to increase fish production but also to establish an effective management system involving local fishers.

Plans include designating selected water bodies as fish sanctuaries, monitoring them to protect fish stocks, and providing training to local people, he said.

Md Khaled Kanak, director general of the DoF, described the initiative as a community-based fisheries development project.

He said projects aimed at improving the livelihoods of baor fishers had been lacking for a long time.

Many baors have become shallow due to siltation, damaging fish habitats and reducing productivity, he said. The project seeks to restore these water bodies and establish an effective community-based management system, he added.



The project aims to increase fish production in the baors of Jashore, Jhenaidah, Chuadanga and Kushtia.

PHOTO: STAR/ FILE

Will foreign firms

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terminal. The port's contract with the company will expire next month.

In March last year, Bangladeshi multinational MGH Group submitted a proposal to upgrade and operate the terminal, with a planned investment of $300m.

Besides, at the fourth joint PPP platform meeting of the Bangladesh-Dubai government-to-government platform in Dubai in April this year, DP World expressed interest in modernising and operating the Chittagong Container Terminal.

MIXED REACTIONS TO THE MOVE

The prospect of foreign firms running more terminals has drawn criticism from different corners, while some port users have called for a more gradual approach.

Sheikh Nurullah Bahar, a former leader of Chattogram Port CBA and general secretary of the Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal's Chattogram divisional unit, said Chittagong Container Terminal and New Mooring Container Terminal have been built and equipped with the port's own funds.

"Both of them delivered productivity beyond expectations under local operators," said Nurullah, also a senior coordinator of the Chattogram Bandar Rokkha Committee, a labour and political alliance opposed to the privatisation and foreign leasing of key terminals.

He said the alliance has no objection to foreign investment in greenfield projects such as Bay Terminal, but sees little scope for major investment in the two older terminals.

Calling the port the heart of the country's economy, he said giving foreign firms operational control of all its container terminals would be risky.

Md Nasir Uddin Chowdhury, a former Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) leader, also urged caution rather than handing over every terminal at once.

Nasir, also a director of the Chittagong chamber, said the government should watch the two global operators at Patenga and New Mooring for a couple of years before deciding. Red Sea Gateway has been at Patenga for only two years, he noted, and the New Mooring deal has only just been finalised.

Md Zafar Alam, a former CPA board member, said he sees no problem with foreign operators at all the terminals.

"Many countries are increasingly using foreign operators to improve the performance of major port terminals, and state-owned authorities often no longer run operations but keep ownership of the land," he said.

He did, however, question the direct appointment of foreign operators through government-to-government deals.

Open tendering should be preferred because it encourages competition, he said. "Under open tendering, other interested global firms could compete, allowing the government to choose the operator offering the best returns and so earn more revenue."

ECONOMISTS SPLIT ON THE WAY FORWARD

Economist Anu Muhammad said a responsible country should keep its premier port under state control for reasons of national security, calling Chattogram the heart of the economy.

"Whoever controls Chattogram port will have control over the entire economy of Bangladesh."

Criticising the handover of terminals to foreign operators one after another, he said it seems control of the economy is being passed to an invisible power.

He said the current elected government should have reviewed the deal with Red Sea Gateway, struck under the Awami League, and the Laldia and Pangaon agreements signed under the interim government.

"Instead, ignoring public and expert opinion, the BNP government signed the New Mooring deal with DP World, a company chosen by the Hasina government, whose deal the Yunus-led interim government rushed to finalise."

He asked why three consecutive governments were so keen to sign deals with a particular company without competitive tenders, and which power was behind it.

"We still don't know about the signed deals while the government is not letting people know about the terms and conditions of these deals."

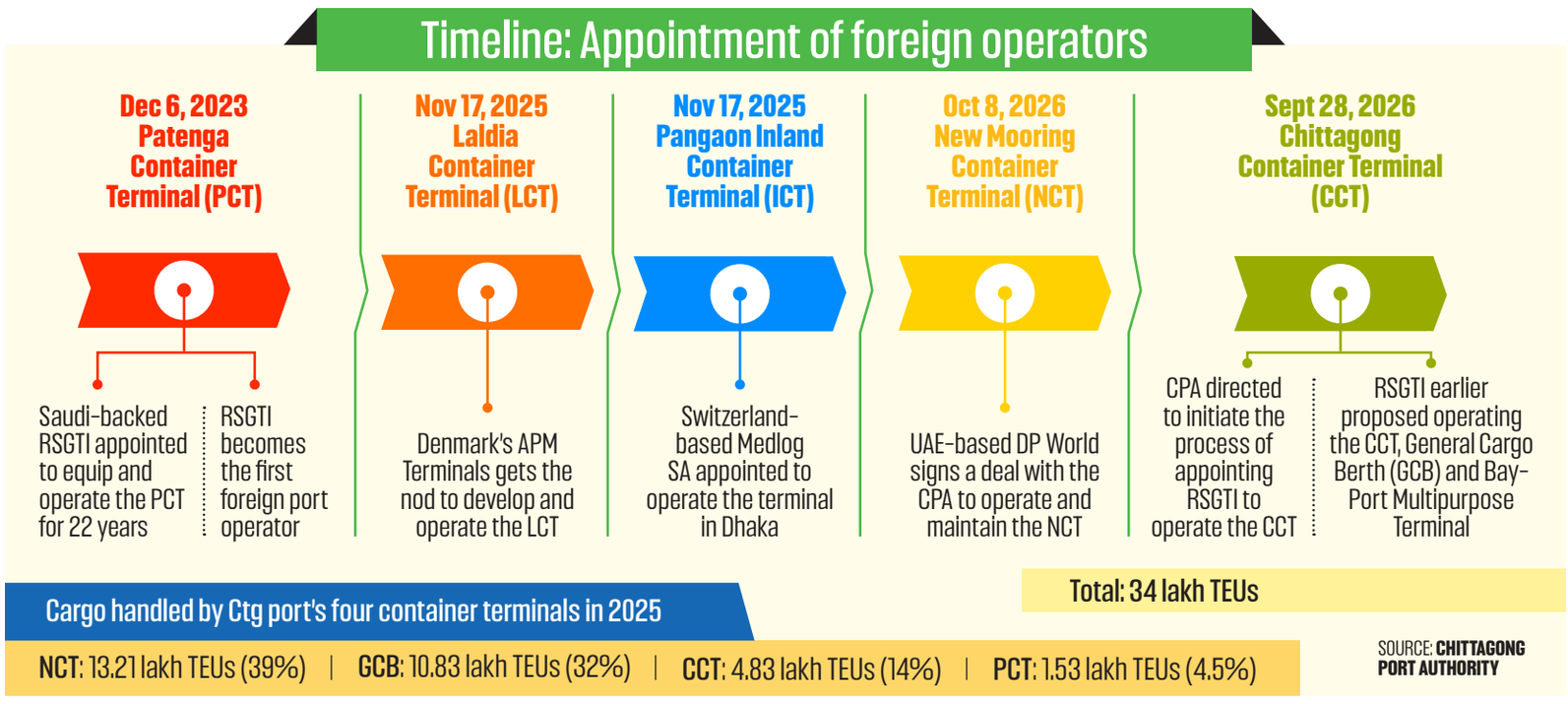
"The port's location on the Bay of Bengal gave it military and geopolitical importance," Anu said. "It is dangerous that people have no clear idea who was taking control of it, or on what terms."

M Masrur Reaz, chairman and CEO of Policy Exchange of Bangladesh, said foreign port operators are needed, but they are not the whole solution.

The port and logistics specialist said Chattogram's limited draft and dependence on tides leave the river-based port at full capacity, and operators alone cannot change that.

But modern management, technology and global expertise can help it perform as well as possible within those limits, he said, which is why he welcomed the government's move.

The economist urged the government to protect the national interest in the deals and to involve local logistics firms wherever possible, to build national capacity.



Ctg port

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The study covered only containerised cargo moving through the port to its destination. It excluded bulk commodities such as cement clinker, stone, scrap metal and wheat, which are unloaded at the outer anchorage.

Shawkat Hossain, general secretary of the Chattogram Customs Clearing and Forwarding (C&F) Agents Association, told The Daily Star that much of the time spent on filing declarations was lost while waiting for documents from banks and overseas suppliers.

Importers have to collect bills of lading, invoices and packing lists through banks, sometimes after settling payments under letters of credit, he said. Delays in getting documents from banks and overseas suppliers, and amendments to letters of credit, can hold up the process

"Once the documents reach us, filing the bill of entry on the NBR server takes only 30 minutes to an hour," said Shawkat. "Most of the time is lost before the documents reach our hands."

Customs officials say laboratory tests and regulatory clearances for certain imports, including food and chemical products, can prolong assessment. Customs laboratories do not have the capacity to conduct all the required tests.

Mohammed Mahbubur Rahman, commissioner at Custom House, Chattogram, said 82 percent of consignments are cleared within two days.

Cases needing chemical tests or involving discrepancies in declarations take longer, he said. "Disputes over Harmonized System (HS) codes, objections from importers, assessment committee decisions and penalty payments can also delay clearance."

Importers and C&F agents said duty payments can be delayed when payment instructions miss banks' submission deadlines for processing through the central bank's real-time gross settlement (RTGS) system. Such delays can push payments to the next working day.

Besides, they said, higher-than-expected duties can also force importers to arrange additional funds, extending the process.

After paying duties, importers must collect delivery orders from shipping agents and submit documents at the port gate. Verification and issuance of exit notes can push the process into the next working day, followed by the wait for physical delivery.

Syed Rafayet Hamim, secretary of Chittagong Port Authority, said most food consignments and industrial raw materials are delivered within 24 hours of duty payment.

The port authority is working to make cargo delivery procedures paperless by December, with the aim of delivering all types of consignments within 24 hours, he added.

Khairul Alam Sujan, vice-president of the Bangladesh Freight Forwarders Association (BAFFA), said fully paperless operations might not be feasible immediately, but reducing paperwork was possible.

At least eight to 10 agencies are involved in moving a consignment from the port to a factory, he said.

Digitising procedures, particularly the collection of delivery orders from shipping agents, could cut the time spent on exit notes and delivery by half, he added.

Khairul also pointed to poor coordination among agencies.

"While some customs and port operations remain open during weekends and holidays, banks, shipping agents and government agencies responsible for chemical testing often remain closed," he said.

Besides, he added, although payment booths are available at the port for customs duties and port charges, there is no similar facility for shipping agents' charges.

He called for better coordination and implementation of decisions taken at meetings with port users that could significantly reduce delays.

Govt plans

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The new wells will add to the supply of the national gas grid and produce around 18 barrels of condensate, helping reduce dependence on imported liquefied natural gas (LNG), he said. The government is working to drill more wells to meet its domestic gas production targets.

Mannan said the government aims to drill 150 wells by 2031 and another 150 between 2031 and 2035 to boost domestic gas production further.

According to the project proposal, the two wells could produce around 100.74 billion cubic feet of gas and 60,444 barrels of condensate over 10 years.

At BGFCL's existing wellhead prices, the estimated value of this output is Tk 339.07 crore, including Tk 285.26 crore from gas and Tk 53.81 crore from condensate. At consumer-level gas prices, the gas output alone would be worth an estimated Tk 6,523.97 crore over the same period.

BGFCL currently supplies around 480 to 485 million cubic feet of gas a day to the national grid from five of its six operational gas fields. The Titas Gas Field, its largest, produces around 330 million cubic feet a day from 23 of its 28 drilled wells.

The project follows a review of three-dimensional seismic survey data collected at the Titas and Bakhrabad gas fields between 2010 and 2012. BGFCL hired BGP Inc, part of China National Petroleum Corporation, to review the data. The consultant recommended drilling 16 infill wells and seven deep wells.

The government has prioritised Titas-32 and Titas-33 under its plan to drill 150 onshore gas wells to increase domestic production.

The project will involve hiring a foreign contractor to drill the wells, appointing local and foreign consultants, installing gas-gathering pipelines and carrying out related work.

The Infrastructure Investment Facilitation Company conducted the feasibility study in 2026. The Planning Commission said the project would help increase domestic gas production, support industrial development and save foreign currency by reducing LNG imports.

The proposal was revised after a Project Evaluation Committee meeting on June 18, 2026, recommended cutting costs. The estimated cost was reduced by Tk 40 crore, from the initial Tk 632 crore to Tk 592 crore.

Middle East

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making it difficult for local exporters to compete in international markets, particularly in Europe and the Middle East.

Kawser Ahmed Rubel, chief executive officer of vegetable exporter Global Trade Link, also identified higher airfreight costs, excessive pesticide residues and inadequate cooling facilities at the airport as major obstacles to vegetable exports.

Airfreight rates had risen to more than Tk 550 per kg from around Tk 490 to Tk 500 last year, he said. The Daily Star could not independently verify the figures. Rubel added that pesticide residues detected in exported vegetables had led to restrictions on country beans and Zara lemons in European markets, affecting export opportunities.

EU regulations now require enhanced border checks on certain Bangladeshi vegetables because of pesticide-residue concerns. The European Commission, under a new regulation issued in June, requires identity and physical checks on 30 percent of consignments of "seem beans" and "helmet beans" from Bangladesh and 20 percent of Zara lemon consignments because of pesticide-residue concerns.

Rubel also pointed to a lack of cooling chambers at the airport, saying perishable cargo often remained at ambient temperatures for three to four hours after security screening before being loaded onto aircraft, potentially compromising product quality.

Mobasserur Rahman, proprietor of BK Trade International, said high airfreight costs were the primary reason for the decline in vegetable exports.

Freight rates to Canada had risen to Tk 750 to Tk 800 per kg from Tk 300 to Tk 350 last year, while rates to London had increased to more than Tk 750 from Tk 250, he said. The Daily Star could not independently verify the figures.

Bangladesh produces more than 15 million tonnes of vegetables annually but exports less than 0.3 percent of that volume, according to a recent report.

Robi, Banglalink

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Payments to applications that collect public investments, provide loans, store money or facilitate financial transactions are also prohibited.

Customers cannot use the service for gambling, casino activities, lotteries, cryptocurrency or crypto-asset trading, foreign-exchange trading, stock-market trading or multi-level marketing.

Where payments to non-resident merchants require foreign-currency remittances, operators must obtain approval from BB's Foreign Exchange Policy Department, where applicable.

The BTRC has also directed operators to ensure that customers receive the digital products and services they pay for, protect their interests, and establish refund and chargeback policies.

DOB operations will remain subject to BB inspections. Mobile network operators will also be treated as reporting organisations under the relevant money-laundering and anti-terrorism laws.

The latest increase follows several revisions to DOB spending limits since the service was introduced in Bangladesh in 2018, when customers could spend up to Tk 600 a month and Tk 3,000 a year.

In December 2025, BB temporarily raised the limits to Tk 2,000 a month and Tk 20,000 a year, paving the way for the latest increase.