

LOSS PREVENTION ADVISORY

Chittagong Port — Lighter Vessel Crisis & Fuel Shortage

⚠ RISK LEVEL: CRITICAL

Discharge delays of 12–19+ days reported. Demurrage running at USD 20,000–25,000/day. No near-term resolution in sight.

Presented By



14 April 2026

1. Purpose of This Advisory

This advisory is issued to all Shipowner and Charterer clients of Interport Advisory Services and Interport Maritime Ltd with vessels trading to, fixed for, or considering fixtures involving Chittagong (Chattogram) Port, Bangladesh.

The purpose is to alert Members and Principals to a critical and rapidly deteriorating operational situation at Chittagong outer anchorage arising from a severe shortage of lighter/barge vessels caused by the ongoing national diesel fuel crisis. The situation carries material demurrage, laytime, delay, and loss exposure for both Owners and Charterers under applicable Charter Party terms.

2. Situation Timeline — How We Got Here

For context, this is the second lighter vessel crisis at Chittagong within 2026. The first occurred in January 2026, when approximately 700 vessels were immobilised as importers used lighter vessels as floating storage ahead of Ramadan. That situation was partially resolved through regulatory enforcement by the Bangladesh Department of Shipping. The current crisis is structurally different and considerably more severe, driven by an external geopolitical fuel supply shock rather than domestic commercial behaviour.

- **March 2026:** Iran war disrupts global oil shipping routes through the Strait of Hormuz. Major international fuel suppliers, including Singapore-based Unipac and Malaysia's Petco Trading Labuan, declare force majeure on contracted shipments to Bangladesh.
- **Early March 2026:** Diesel shortages begin appearing across Bangladesh. Panic buying and illegal hoarding by syndicates compound the supply deficit at the national level.
- **Mid-March 2026:** Diesel supply to marine dealers at Chittagong drops sharply. The daily fuel requirement for lightering operations is approximately 250,000 litres; actual supply falls to 60,000–70,000 litres — roughly 25% of operational needs.
- **30 March 2026:** The Bangladesh Water Transport Coordination Cell (BWTCC) formally writes to the Power and Energy Minister warning that cargo handling at Chittagong Port could come to a complete standstill. No effective government response has been received as of the date of this advisory.
- **13 April 2026:** Ground-level confirmation obtained from Shahadat Hossain Chowdhury, Senior Staff Reporter, Daily Times of Bangladesh, that approximately 90 lighter vessels remain operational out of a registered fleet of approximately 2,000 — representing less than 5% of normal capacity.

3. Current Operational Conditions — As of 14 April 2026

Lighter Vessel Availability — Critical

Of approximately 2,000 registered lighter/barge vessels operating at Chittagong outer anchorage, only around 90 are currently operational, with 74 stationed at the outer anchorage. At least 200 vessels are lying completely idle due to fuel unavailability. Once cargo is loaded onto a lighter vessel, many lack sufficient fuel to reach their inland destination or return to the anchorage for the next cycle — creating a cascading bottleneck that compounds the shortage daily.

Discharge Delays — Quantified

Under normal conditions, a mother vessel completes discharge at Chittagong outer anchorage within 5–7 days. Current discharge times are running at 12–15 days as confirmed by the Berth Operator, Ship Handling Operator and Terminal Operator Owners Association. As a live, verifiable benchmark: **MV Bright Falcon** (bulk carrier, wheat cargo ex-Bahia Blanca, Argentina) arrived at the outer anchorage on 25 March 2026 and remained undischarged as of 13 April 2026 — a waiting period of approximately **19 days and counting**, against a normal expectation of 5–7 days.

Cascading Delays and Financial Exposure

Post-discharge cargo delivery to inland destinations, which previously took approximately 15 days, is now exceeding 20 days, further depleting the stock of available vessels and reinforcing the cycle of delay. The BWTCC, which regulates approximately 1,200 lighter vessels, previously held daily allocation meetings — now held less frequently due to reduced vessel availability, typically allocating 70–80 vessels per meeting.

Demurrage at Chittagong outer anchorage is currently running at **USD 20,000–25,000 per vessel per day**, depending on vessel size, as confirmed by industry operators on the ground.

Bangladesh Broader Energy Picture

The fuel crisis extends well beyond the port. Bangladesh currently holds diesel reserves estimated at approximately 185,000 tonnes — roughly 14 days of national supply. Gas shortages have forced five of the country's six state-run fertiliser factories to shut. The government has requested a US sanctions waiver to source refined fuel from Russia and is sourcing emergency supply from China, India, and other international traders. Local experts uniformly advise that the situation is unlikely to stabilise in the near term, with April import plans already showing a significant confirmed-shipment shortfall.

4. Comparative Context — This Is Not an Isolated Event

Chittagong Port has experienced a series of compounding operational disruptions over the past six months. Owners and Charterers should view the current crisis in this context: Chittagong has been operating under sustained and compounding pressure throughout 2025–26, with each disruption leaving residual exposure before the next arrives.

- **October 2025:** Chittagong Port Authority implemented a 41% tariff increase — the first major revision in nearly four decades — triggering industrial action by transport operators and significant port disruption.
- **January 2026:** First lighter vessel shortage crisis, driven by vessels being used as floating storage ahead of Ramadan. Approximately 700 vessels immobilised nationwide.
- **January–February 2026:** Seven-day port workers' strike (31 January–9 February), followed by national election holidays (10–12 February), resulted in yard congestion peaking at over 43,000 TEUs and extended vessel backlogs at outer anchorage that persisted for weeks after the strike ended.
- **February 2026:** Locomotive shortage left over 1,000 containers stranded at the port, constraining inland evacuation to Dhaka ICD.
- **March–April 2026:** Current fuel/diesel crisis — the most severe disruption of the series because of the geopolitical conflict (in Iran) — now layering onto an already-stressed port system.

5. Legal and Charter Party Framework

For Owners

Delays at the outer anchorage caused by the unavailability of lighter/barge vessels where the cause is an external fuel supply crisis outside the control of the port and the vessel are generally not attributable to Owners. Under standard laytime/demurrage provisions, time spent waiting for lighter vessels that cannot be allocated due to fuel shortage will typically count as laytime or demurrage once the NOR is valid, depending on whether the CP is on WIBON, WIPON, WCCON or similar terms.

- Tender NOR promptly and strictly in accordance with CP terms upon arrival at the designated anchorage.

- Log all waiting time, lighter vessel allocation attempts, and discharge progress meticulously on a daily basis.
- Place Charterers on formal written notice that delays arising from lighter vessel unavailability are not within Owners' sphere of responsibility.
- Review force majeure and port congestion clauses in the applicable CP, as these may affect whether time counts or is suspended.

For Charterers

Charterers who have nominated Chittagong as the discharge port bear the risk of delays arising from the conditions at that port under most standard CP forms. The current crisis is well-documented, publicly reported, and officially acknowledged by Bangladeshi government bodies — which substantially weakens any argument that the situation was unforeseeable or that Charterers were unaware.

- Review freight and demurrage exposure carefully against vessel ETA and current discharge conditions.
- Engage with consignees and receivers regarding cargo readiness and possible arrangements to accelerate lighter vessel allocation.
- Consider whether the CP contains provisions that may allow for a change of discharge port or lightening arrangements outside the anchorage.
- Retain legal advice where demurrage exposure is material.

6. Outlook

The situation is not expected to improve in the near term. Emergency fuel shipments from China and India have temporarily stabilised the national supply picture, but marine dealers — who sit at the end of the distribution chain — continue to receive only a fraction of their required allocation. No structural resolution is foreseeable until either: (a) the Middle East conflict eases sufficiently to restore normal global fuel supply routes; or (b) Bangladesh successfully diversifies its fuel import sources to a level that restores adequate downstream supply to the marine sector.

Until then, Members should operate on the assumption of a realistic discharge window of **12–20 days** at Chittagong outer anchorage, against the pre-crisis norm of 5–7 days.

7. Guidance to Members and Principals

All Members with vessels calling at or scheduled to call Chittagong Port are advised to:

- Monitor real-time discharge prospects through local agents, updated at minimum every 48 hours.
- Tender NOR promptly on arrival and maintain meticulous laytime records from that point forward.
- Place Charterers on formal written notice of expected delays and their contractual attribution.
- Preserve all documentation: published reports (including this advisory), the BWTCC government correspondence of 30 March 2026, ground-source confirmation, and all CP-related communications.
- Notify the Club and/or P&I correspondents without delay where delays are likely to give rise to demurrage claims or disputes.
- Remain alert to anchorage safety risks including increased vessel density, anchor dragging, and potential pollution incidents in congested anchorage conditions.
- Factor a 12–20 day outer anchorage discharge window into all forward voyage and programme calculations until further notice.

8. Sources

- Shahadat Hossain Chowdhury, Senior Staff Reporter, Daily Times of Bangladesh — direct ground-level confirmation, 13 April 2026.
- Bangladesh Water Transport Coordination Cell (BWTCC) — official government correspondence, 30 March 2026.
- Berth Operator, Ship Handling Operator and Terminal Operator Owners Association — industry statement on discharge delays and demurrage quantum.
- Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) — official fuel reserve and import data.
- Fibre2Fashion / The Daily Star / The Business Standard / Modern Diplomacy / Dhaka Tribune — published media reports, March–April 2026.
- Interport Advisory Services internal port monitoring and prior bulletins (January–March 2026 series).

Further updates will be circulated as developments warrant.

About Interport Advisory Services

Interport Advisory Services, the consulting arm of the Interport Group, integrates global advisory standards with deep local expertise. Drawing on the Group's long-standing presence in the maritime domain, encompassing roles as P&I Correspondents, Ship Agents, Marine Surveyors, and Logistics Specialists, the division provides strategic, practical, and execution-focused solutions to stakeholders across the shipping and trade sectors.

Each advisory engagement is underpinned by Interport's decades of operational experience and a strong emphasis on implementation and risk control, ensuring that every recommendation translates into tangible outcomes in complex and evolving maritime environments.

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