Cargo handling rises at Ctg port despite pandemic

The port was not shut for a single day even during the pandemic. The round-the-clock operation has helped the port handle more than three million TEUs in the just-concluded fiscal year, CPA Chairman M Shahjahan said.

PHOTO: STAR/FILE

Dwaipayan Barua, *Ctg*

Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, Chattogram port clocked 3.1 per cent year-on-year growth in container handling in the just-concluded fiscal year, which highlighted the growing foreign trade of Bangladesh, official data showed.

The premier port in the country handled 30,97,236 twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs) of containers in the fiscal year 2020-21, up from 30,04,142 TEUs a year ago, according to data from the Chittagong Port Authority (CPA).

The figure was found by calculating the containers handled by the port, the Pangaon Inland Container Terminal and the Kamalapur Inland Container Depot, said CPA Secretary Md Omar Faruk.

The port registered 2.92 per cent growth in 2019-20 and 3.28 per cent in 2018-19. It handled 30.04 lakh TEUs in FY20 and 28.08 lakh TEUs in FY19.

Commercial items, machinery, commodities, chemicals, and industrial raw materials, except for those used in cement and ceramics manufacturing, are imported through containers. All export-oriented goods are solely carried through containers.

Cargo handling by the port was up 11.98 per cent year-on-year.

The port handled 11.37 crore tonnes of cargo in FY21 against 10.16 crore tonnes the previous year.

Vessel movement through the port also rose: 4,062 vessels plied to and from the port in FY21, up from 3,764 in the preceding year.

CPA Chairman M Shahjahan said, "The port was not shut for a single day even during the pandemic. The round-the-clock operation has helped us handle more than three million TEUs in the year."

He thanked the port staff and workers and other stakeholders such as berth operators, ship-handling operators, importers, exporters, shipping agents, clearing and forwarding agents, freight forwarders, and customs officials for working together to achieve the growth.

The number of gantry cranes has increased from four to 14 and the storage capacity on the yards has also increased, said Shahjahan.

"These capacity-enhancing measures helped the port raise the productivity."

Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry President Mahbubul Alam lauded the handling of such a vast number of containers during the pandemic.

READ MORE ON B3

Rod prices surge for costlier raw materials

Millers call for tax cuts

Jagaran Chakma

The price of mild steel (MS) rods has increased by Tk 1,500 per tonne in Bangladesh in the past month because of the rising cost of raw materials globally, making building houses and implementing infrastructure projects costlier.

The spike in the price came even though the source tax was slashed in the budget for fiscal 2021-22.

Manufacturers blame the increasing cost of melting scrap in the international market for the price hike in the local market. So, the cost of building private homes and implementing infrastructures and development projects will not decline.

The retail price of 60-grade MS rod rose to Tk 75,000 per tonne, up from Tk 73,500 per tonne one month ago, data from the state-run Trading Corporation of Bangladesh showed.

Rod prices jumped 38 per cent in the last year as millers were compelled to hike the rates in the wake of spiralling scrap prices in the global market.

A year ago, 60-grade MS rods were sold for Tk 54,000 per tonne after the demand went down to almost zero due to the coronavirus pandemic, putting the brakes on the construction sector.

"The impact of the increasing price of melting scrap in the global market will affect the local market in a short time. If the situation remains unchanged, the price of MS rods could hit Tk 80,000 per tonne," said Tapan Sengupta, deputy managing director of BSRM, the largest steelmaker in Bangladesh.

"This would be a burden for infrastructure and construction projects," he added.

The price of melting scrap, which was $300 to $350 per tonne last October, has risen to $590 per tonne, prompting several countries, including India, to cut the tariffs on raw material imports.

Around 70 per cent to 85 per cent of the melting scrap used by the domestic steel industry has to be imported, while the rest is produced locally.

The scrap is imported from the US, Canada, Australia, South Korea, and European countries.

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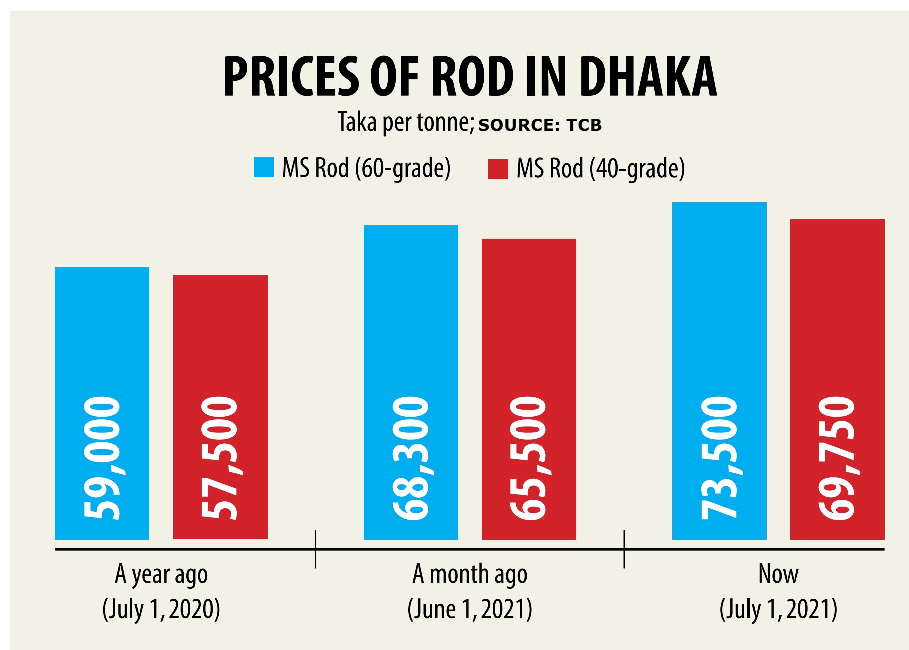

GLOBAL BUSINESS

India's industrial activity shrinks for first time in 11 months

Reuters, *Bengaluru*

India's factory activity contracted for the first time in almost a year in June as restrictions to contain the deadly second wave of the coronavirus triggered declines in demand and output that pushed firms to cut more jobs, a private survey showed on Thursday.

Although many Indian states have recently relaxed some containment measures following a decrease in daily cases the rapid emergence of the new Delta Plus variant has raised concerns over the nation's already weak economic outlook.

The Nikkei Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index, compiled by IHS Markit, declined to an 11-month low of 48.1 in June from May's 50.8, moving below the 50-level separating growth from contraction.

"The intensification of the Covid-19 crisis in India had a detrimental impact on the manufacturing economy," said Pollyanna De Lima, economics associate director at IHS Markit.

"Out of the three broad areas of the manufacturing sector monitored by the survey, capital goods was the worst-affected area in June. Output here declined at a steep rate due to a sharp fall in sales."

As overall demand and output shrank in June for the first time in 11 months, manufacturing firms extended their record job cutting spree, albeit at a slower pace.

The survey, conducted before Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's announcement of additional fiscal support on Monday, also showed optimism about the year ahead declined to its lowest since July 2020.

"Companies became increasingly worried about when the pandemic will end, which resulted in downward revisions to output growth projections. As a result of subdued optimism, jobs were shed again in June," De Lima said.

Despite a sustained rise in input costs, firms increased output prices at a slower rate last month to attract demand.

However, that may not be enough to significantly soften a surge in overall inflation, which hit a six-month high in May. A jump in input costs due to a strong increase in energy and commodity prices pushed wholesale price inflation to its strongest in at least 15 years.

Still, the Reserve Bank of India, which in April cut its growth forecast for this fiscal year to 9.5 per cent from 10.5 per cent, was not expected to hike its key interest rates anytime soon as the primary focus remains on boosting economic growth.

REUTERS/FILE

A worker wearing a protective face mask cleans a machine inside an undergarment factory after it was re-opened after a week-long shutdown to slow the spread of coronavirus disease in Kolkata on April 20, 2020.

European factories racing

Reuters, *London/Tokyo*

European factories continued to ramp up their post-lockdown recovery in June but Asian manufacturers saw momentum weaken amid rising input costs and the reintroduction of curbs to combat a new wave of coronavirus infections, surveys showed.

Euro zone manufacturing activity expanded at its fastest pace on record last month while Britain's factories extended their post-lockdown recovery and went on a hiring spree.

"How has that story turned — a few months ago we were seeing the euro zone was lagging with vaccinations far behind. We were expecting a turnaround and we haven't seen much disappointment," said Bert Colijn at ING.

"That upside scenario has materialised. There is a very broad feeling amongst businesses in both services and industry that the coming months are going to be very strong as economies reopen."

Czech and Polish manufacturing hit a record pace of activity for the second month in a row as orders rose and economies opened up again.

But manufacturing activity grew at a slower pace in China and Japan as raw materials rose, while activity shrank in Vietnam, Malaysia and India, where governments imposed tougher restrictions to contain fresh coronavirus outbreaks.

REUTERS/FILE

Employees working on the assembly line at the BMW factory in Berlin.

A shortage of shipping containers and supply chains hugely affected by the global pandemic have made it a sellers' market for materials needed by factories.

An index measuring input prices in the euro zone was at its highest since the survey began 24 years ago.

IHS Markit's final manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) nevertheless rose to a survey high of 63.4 in June from May's 63.1, above an initial 63.1 "flash" estimate. Anything above 50 indicates growth.

Britain's PMI dipped to 63.9 from May's all-time high but the pace of expansion in output, new orders and employment remained among the highest in the survey's near 30-year history after some Covid-19 restrictions were eased.

Data showed Asia was lagging behind western economies in recovering from the pandemic doldrums, reinforcing the view that many regional central banks were unlikely to withdraw pandemic-era stimulus soon.

New recycling techniques set to make electric vehicles greener

Reuters, *London*

Researchers in Britain and the United States have found ways to recycle electric vehicle batteries that can drastically cut costs and carbon emissions, shoring up sustainable supplies for an expected surge in demand.

The techniques, which involve retrieving parts of the battery so they can be reused, would help the auto industry tackle criticism that even though EVs reduce emissions over their lifetime, they start out with a heavy carbon footprint of mined materials.

As national governments and regions race to secure supplies for an expected acceleration in EV demand, the breakthroughs could make valuable supplies of materials such as cobalt and nickel go further. They would also reduce dependence on China and difficult mining jurisdictions.

"We can't recycle complex products like batteries the way we recycle other metals. Shredding, mixing up the components of a battery and pyrometallurgy destroy value," Gavin Harper, a research fellow at the government-backed Faraday Institution in Britain, said.

Pyrometallurgy refers to the extraction of metals using high heat in blast furnaces, which analysts say is not economic.

Current recycling methods also rely on shredding the batteries into very small pieces, known as black mass, which is then processed into metals such as cobalt and nickel.