

Germany shuts three nuclear power plants

REUTERS, Berlin

Germany has pulled the plug on three of its last six nuclear power stations as it moves towards completing its withdrawal from nuclear power as it turns its focus to renewables.

Under Germany's energy transition policy, the Gundremmingen, Brokdorf, and Grohnde nuclear power plants will be decommissioned on December 31, 2021.

The Gundremmingen power plant still produces 10 billion kWh of power per year, though parts of it have already been shut down — enough to provide the entire Munich metropolitan region with electricity.

A target of protests by opposition to nuclear power in the 1980s, the Brokdorf plant will shut down at midnight on New Year's Eve, much to its overseers' disdain.

"The last few days have been accompanied by a fair amount of melancholy. We have operated the plant for 35 years. We looked after it, we kept it at the best technical level and we always operated it safely," revealed Guido Knot, chairman of the management board at the operating company PreussenElektra.

However, no melancholy or remorse was felt by Karsten Hinrichsen, a longtime anti-nuclear activist known as the "Brokdorf rebel".

"I am quietly but steadily rejoicing that the thing is now shut down. This is not euphoria. Some people ask me if this is a victory. No, it's not, it's taken far too long for that," Hinrichsen said.

By the end of 2022, Germany will have achieved its goal of completely phasing out nuclear power, set by Chancellor Angela Merkel on May 30, 2011. The plan represented a dramatic change of course by Merkel's ruling Conservatives, who just a few months earlier had agreed to extend the lifespan of Germany's oldest power stations.



After the initial shock of the pandemic, economic activities around the world began to intensify from the end of 2020, which caused a rise in goods transport through the Chattogram port.

PHOTO: STAR/FILE

Ctg port posts 13pc growth in container handling

DWAIPAYAN BARUA, Chattogram

Bangladesh's premier seaport in Chattogram handled record number of containers in 2021 and also posted over 13 per cent year-on-year growth in container handling.

The port handled 3,214,448 TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent units) of export, import and empty containers in the just concluded year, up from 2,839,977 TEUs in 2020.

The figure was prepared after including the number of containers loaded and unloaded at the main jetties of the port along with Pangaon Inland Container Terminal in Keraniganj and Kamalapur Inland Container Depot in Dhaka, said CPA Secretary Md Omar Faruk.

The number of containers handled by the port in a year crossed 3 million TEUs for the first time in 2019 when 3,088,187 TEUs of containers were handled, posting a 6.34 per cent year-on-year rise.

In 2020, the country's foreign trade marked a sharp 8 per cent fall in annual container handling, when the port handled 2,839,977 TEUs.

So, annual container throughput also saw a negative turn last year driving the port out of the "Three Million Club" in terms of container handling.

With the resumption of business

activities at home and abroad after the primary waves of Covid-19, the country's foreign trade gained momentum with a rise in container and goods transport through the port since the final quarter of last year.

Earlier, the port posted 8.88 per cent year-on-year growth in container handling in 2018 and 10.13 per cent in 2017. The port handled 29.04 lakh TEUs in 2018 while the figure was 26.67 lakh TEUs in 2017.

Different types of commercial items, machinery, commodity, chemical products and all sorts of industrial raw materials except cement and ceramics are imported through containers while export goods are solely carried through containers.

Cargo handling by the port also posted 13 per cent year-on-year growth in 2021.

The port handled a total of 11.66 crore tonnes of cargo in 2021, up from 10.32 crore tonnes in the previous year.

Vessel arrival at the port also rose in the same period.

A total of 4,209 vessels arrived in 2021 while the number was at 3,728 in 2020.

After the initial shock of the pandemic, economic activities around the world began to intensify from the end of 2020, which caused a rise in goods transport through the Chattogram port, said Mahbubul Alam, president of Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

(CCCI). He thanked the port authority for keeping the port running round the clock.

The port did not face remarkable vessel congestion this year when many regional and global ports remained choked with congestion for many weeks, he said.

The port had limited manpower, but they managed keeping the port running 24/7, which helped the trading channel handle record number of containers in the year, CPA Chairman Rear Admiral M Shahjahan said.

He said the port management maintained personal supervision and closed monitoring over the port's operational activities as well as maintained coordination with all the stakeholders to avoid congestion over the period.

He thanked the port staffs and workers as well as all the stakeholders like berth operators, ship handling operators, importers, exporters, shipping agents, clearing and forwarding agents, freight forwarders, customs officials and others, who worked together in a coordinated way.

The number of gantry crane has been increased from 4 to 14 in the port while its storage capacity in the yards has been increased gradually, the chairman said, adding that these capacity enhancing measures helped the port grow its productivity.

Businesses look to brighter 2022

FROM PAGE B1
and brands are coming to Bangladesh with more than expected work orders.

"We have to maintain a stable business environment so that we can execute the orders. I am hopeful that 2022 will be better for us than 2021 as prospects are brighter," said M A Jabbar, managing director of DBL Group, a leading garment exporter.

"We have already proved our resilience and Bangladesh has already become a global champion by maintaining a strong supply chain even during the peak of Covid-19."

AK Azad, chairman and chief executive officer of Ha-Meem Group, a top garment exporter, echoed Jabbar.

For pandemic related situations, some businesses have shifted to Bangladesh from other countries such as including China and Vietnam. Local investment has also increased."

"We will see the results in 2023-24," Azad said.

He, however, says the impacts of Omicron have slowed businesses in the European markets. US customers are also in a slow lane.

"They are observing the situation. The coronavirus situation will decide the course of next investments," said Azad, also a former president

of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

"If the pandemic situation does not worsen, we will do better in 2022," said K M Rezaul Hasanat, chairman and CEO of Viyellatex Group, another major industrial conglomerate.

According to the entrepreneur, mindset is very important.

The confidence level of people is growing. The confidence level of our business people has increased manifold, and this will help boost our economy."

"We have a lot of challenges and we have also success stories. Many major countries also now count Bangladesh as our economy is growing."

Sabbir Hasan Nasir, executive director of ACI Logistics, the parent company of Shwapno, the largest retail chain in Bangladesh, sees huge opportunities in online business segment.

He says the flow of investment to the healthcare sector is rising. "Pharmaceuticals and agri-businesses are growing as well."

He cited non-availability of raw materials and high prices as two major challenges facing businesses now.

Naser Ezaz Bijoy, CEO of Standard Chartered

said 2022 would be a good year if the nation can face the upcoming Omicron challenges.

"In the last two years, many investors have not invested because of uncertainty. If you can execute the under-process reforms, including one-stop services, the new year will be a good one."

Mostafa Kamal, chairman and managing director of Meghna Group of Industries, plans to set up five new factories this year after their launch was delayed by the pandemic last year.

"Every disaster creates new opportunities for investment. I found an opportunity in the shipping industry," he said.

Ahsan Khan Chowdhury, chairman and CEO of Pran RFL Group, thinks export will increase tremendously in 2022 because there is a surge in demand in the developed economies.

"We are finding a lot more opportunities in the UK, Europe and the US," he said.

He says domestic demand in Bangladesh is also rising because people have better jobs and are spending more.

"Due to Covid-19, many things were stagnant in the country. There are a lot of celebrations now. Activities are picking up."

DITF kicks off in new venue

FROM PAGE B1

Sitting on more than 26 acres, the two-storey complex has 33,000 square metres of floor space, of which 24,370 square metres are meant to be used for exhibitions. There are also 800 booths for displaying products.

Besides, the facility has 7,912 square metres of parking space capable of accommodating 1,000 cars.

The centre also has a multifunctional hall room with a seating capacity of 473 people alongside a 50-seat conference room.

In addition, there are six negotiation rooms, a large cafeteria, an open space for children to play and various amenities.

Customarily inaugurated by the prime minister, the annual fair was cancelled last year for the Covid-19 fallouts.

The commerce ministry and EPB have been jointly organising the fair since 1995 in the city's Agargaon area.

However, the venue was shifted to Purbachal due to the previous one in Agargaon having gradually turned out to be too small to accommodate the ever-growing number of participants and visitors.

Banks glowing with paper profit

FROM PAGE B1

the lenders, were supposed to manage a good amount dividend last year, but this would ultimately weaken the banks.

A major portion of the profits did not derive from the loan instalments of borrowers. Banks calculated the amount by anticipating that the fund would be realised in 2022.

Banks provide dividend based on the net profit, a majority of which come from the operating profit. But as there has not been actual profit this time for many lenders, the gap will have to be met by the cash available that largely come from depositors.

Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh, said that the high operating profit logged by the banks was just an inflated figure,

which should be treated as "eyewash".

This has camouflaged the actual state of the banking sector as the majority of banks have registered the profit by using the central bank's relaxed policy, he said.

The former official of the International Monetary Fund pointed out that a good number of loans, which have been used to show the profit, may slip into the default zone category this year.

"So, the central bank should compel banks to

improve their provision and capital base."

The central bank has asked banks to preserve an additional 2 per cent provision along with the required 1 per cent against the loans under the relaxed policy.

The central bank should not extend the forbearance as the strength of banks has already eroded due to the business slowdown stemming from the coronavirus pandemic, Mansur said.

The relaxation has also encouraged the habitual defaulters as they have been able to avoid the default zone by giving a small amount in installments than they would have to be paid otherwise.

"The banks that have not set aside required provisions but transferred income to their profit will only see their health deteriorate," said Mansur.

Syed Mahbubur Rahman, managing director of Mutual Trust Bank, said that banks should be careful in calculating the profit because Omicron, the highly mutant Covid-19 variant, was spreading at a faster clip.

"Banks should place more importance in strengthening the provision base rather than calculating profit as we don't know what lies ahead."

Emranul Huq, managing director of Dhaka Bank, credited the default loan recovery programme of his bank for the robust profit last year.

The lender also made a magnificent profit from the businesses of exports and imports, he said.

Profit in Dhaka Bank stood at Tk 723 crore last year, up 39 per cent year-on-year.

Kamal Hossain, managing director of Southeast Bank, said that his bank faced lower classified loans in 2021 than the previous year due to the BB classification policy. It has also managed a good income from foreign exchange-related businesses. The operating profit of Southeast Bank was Tk 1,016 crore, an increase of 25 per cent year-on-year.

The profit at National Bank, however, nosedived to Tk 238 crore compared to Tk 920 crore, the only lender among the 22 that saw lower profit last year than the previous year.

MD Mehmood Husain, managing director of National Bank, said that the central bank imposed an embargo on the disbursement of new loans last year, leading to a decline in profit.

"In addition, default loans went up. And this has forced us to preserve more provision to keep the financial health stable."

Global stocks end strong year with losses

AFP, New York

Global stock markets closed lower Friday, the final trading session of 2021 — a year of strong gains overall as economies recovered despite ongoing restrictions caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

On Wall Street, the broad-based S&P 500 had its best December in over a decade, and scored a third straight year of double-digit gains with a 27.1 per cent jump. The index notched records 70 times this year, "second only to 1954," said analyst Sam Stovall.

"2021 was a very good year. The benchmark Dow Jones Industrial Average won 18.7 per cent, while high-flying tech stocks pushed the Nasdaq up 21.4 per cent. London's benchmark FTSE 100 index fell 0.3 per cent in a shortened trading session ahead of the New Year, posting an increase of 14 per cent for the year.

The Paris CAC 40 index rocketed almost 29 per cent this year, its best showing for more than 20 years. Germany's DAX had ended its year Thursday, having surged nearly 16 per cent in 2021.

While markets soared in 2021, they seesawed in recent months as investors worried about resurging inflation, the prospect of an end to central bank largesse and the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.