Patenga Container Terminal to get four new cranes at $30m

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Ctg*

Red Sea Gateway Terminal (RSGT) Bangladesh, the operator of Patenga Container Terminal (PCT) at Chattogram port, is set to invest around $30 million in purchasing four state-of-the-art ship-to-shore (STS) cranes in order to boost the terminal's operational capacity.

The company has recently signed an agreement with Chinese firm SANY Marine Heavy Industry for the purchase, according to a press release issued by the terminal operator.

The investment comes after the recent acquisition of 14 rubber-tyred gantry cranes (RTGs) for $26 million, according to the statement.

RSGT Bangladesh, a subsidiary of the Saudi company RSGTI and Bangladesh's first international terminal operator, expects to receive all equipment by the first quarter of next year, said an official of the company.

The new STS cranes, which will be custom-built for the PCT, will enable the handling of larger vessels at Chattogram port, according to the statement.

Scheduled for deployment in early 2026, the cranes are expected to enhance PCT's annual container handling capacity from 250,000 twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs) to 600,000 TEUs, significantly improving efficiency and reducing logistics costs, it added.

"Following the recent acquisition of 14 RTGs, the investment in these new STS cranes marks another important step in our ongoing efforts to enhance terminal operations in Bangladesh," said RSGT Bangladesh CEO Erwin Haaze.

"This upgrade is expected to further improve efficiency and contribute to a more cost-effective supply chain for Bangladeshi trade," the CEO added.

Haaze said that RSGT is working closely with the Chittagong Port Authority and other key stakeholders, including the planning ministry, the National Board of Revenue, customs, and industry associations, to align operations and ensure efficiency.

"As the first private terminal in the country, we are committed to contributing to the advancement of Bangladesh's maritime and logistics infrastructure," he said.

Earlier, RSGT Bangladesh signed a 22-year concession agreement with Chattogram port in December 2023 to operate the new Patenga Container Terminal.

Since the commencement of partial operations in June last year, geared vessels equipped with onboard cranes have been berthing at the terminal, with only export containers being handled.

The Bangladesh Land Port Authority and customs officials said 80 percent of businesses at the Burimari land port depend on stone imports while the trade of other products accounts for the rest.

PHOTO: S DILIP ROY

Boulder rate row slows external trade through Burimari land port

25,000 labourers left without work

S DILIP ROY

Stone and boulder imports from India and Bhutan through Burimari land port in Lalmonirhat, the second-largest land port in Bangladesh, have been halted since February 1 due to price disputes.

However, the import-export trade of other goods, including fruits, dolomite powder, and gypsum from India and Bhutan, as well as jhut, garments, and biscuits from Bangladesh, is ongoing, albeit at a slower pace.

As stone and boulder imports have stopped, around 25,000 workers engaged in loading and unloading stones and crushing boulders have been plunged into unemployment.

Additionally, around 500 stone-crushing machines remain idle.

The Bangladesh Land Port Authority and customs officials said 80 percent of businesses at the Burimari land port depend on stone imports while the trade of other products accounts for only 20 percent.

Due to the halt in stone imports from India and Bhutan, the once-bustling land port now appears largely inactive, costing the government revenue worth around Tk 1.5 crore each day.

Mehedi Hasan, assistant director of the Bangladesh Land Port Authority at Burimari, told The Daily Star that an average of 10,000 tonnes of boulders and 800 tonnes of crushed stone were imported from India and Bhutan every day before February 1.

On average, 80-100 trucks carrying export goods left Bangladesh for India daily.

But now their numbers have dropped to 45-50. Similarly, 100-120 goods-laden trucks arrived from India and Bhutan daily, but the figure has now decreased to 50-60.

"Due to the price dispute, importers at Burimari land port are not importing stones, which is negatively affecting trade," he said. "Importers and exporters from both countries have been holding discussions daily, but no solution has been reached yet."

Anisur Rahman, a stone worker at Burimari land port, said that 20-30 workers are employed for each stone-crushing machine, with each worker earning Tk 500 per day.

"We have become unemployed as the grinding machines remain idle due to the lack of boulders," he said, adding that around 13,000 workers are engaged in stone crushing.

Maminul Islam, a loading and unloading worker at Burimari, said about 12,000 workers are engaged in handling goods, especially stones.

"We are in great trouble due to unemployment. We have to borrow money to survive," he added.

Noor Islam, a stone trader at Burimari land port, said there is a daily demand for 2.6 lakh to 2.8 lakh cubic feet of stones. Contractors and traders from different parts of the country buy stones from them.

He added that each tonne of a boulder produces 24 cubic feet of crushed stone. Every day, 15-20 tonnes of boulders are processed in each crushing machine.

"I have four stone-crushing machines, but they have been shut down since February 1 due to the halt in imports," he added. "We are unable to supply stones to contractors and traders."

Shah Alam, an LGED contractor in Lalmonirhat, said the price of stone has increased by Tk 20-25 per cubic foot at Burimari land port due to the import halt.

"Before February 1, I used to buy stone at Tk 110-115 per cubic foot. Since I need stone for construction, I am now forced to buy it at a higher rate."

Faruk Hossain, president of the C&F Agents Association at Burimari land port, said that stone exporters from India and Bhutan were charging $1-2 more per tonne of boulders, making it unprofitable for Bangladeshi importers.

"Despite requests to lower the price, exporters from India and Bhutan have not taken any action. This led to the halt in boulder imports," he said.

"As we are not importing stones, some Indian importers have also lost interest in importing goods from Bangladesh," he added. "We are continuing discussions to resolve the issue."

EU due diligence rules and local apparel industry

MD MOHIUDDIN RUBEL

The European Union's Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) is set to transform global trade and corporate practices, marking a watershed moment for industries worldwide. Slated to take full effect by 2026, this landmark legislation represents the EU's boldest move yet to integrate sustainability and accountability into business operations.

For the global apparel industry -- long associated with environmental challenges and labour rights concerns -- the directive signals a monumental shift. It is not merely a policy but a call to action for a sector notorious for intricate supply chains and sustainability hurdles.

At its heart, the CSDDD requires companies operating within or engaging with the EU to identify, mitigate, and prevent adverse human rights and environmental impacts throughout their value chains. This involves tackling issues like forced labour, unsafe working conditions, and ecological harm. Businesses must perform comprehensive due diligence, implement preventative measures, monitor progress, and publicly report findings. Moreover, the directive emphasises meaningful engagement with stakeholders, including workers, local communities, and civil society, to foster sustainable solutions. Non-compliance will result in severe penalties, ranging from hefty fines to exclusion from the EU market.

For the global apparel sector, the directive's implications are profound. It enforces unprecedented levels of transparency, compelling brands to trace and map their supply chains to the raw material level. What was once voluntary now becomes a legal requirement, demanding substantial investments in digital technologies, audits, and certifications. Companies that fail to comply risk losing access to one of the largest consumer markets in the world, while those that embrace the directive's ethos may gain a competitive edge. However, the financial burden of compliance will ripple down to suppliers, many of whom operate in resource-constrained developing countries.

For Bangladesh, the world's second-largest exporter of ready-made garments (RMG), the stakes are especially high. The EU remains a crucial market for its apparel exports, making the CSDDD impossible to overlook.

However, the challenges are formidable. Many of Bangladesh's small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which dominate the sector, lack the financial and technical capacity to meet the directive's stringent requirements. The fragmented and informal nature of the supply chain further complicates efforts to achieve transparency and traceability. Compliance will demand investments in sustainable practices, digitalisation, and certifications, adding strain to already tight profit margins.

Yet, this directive also presents a unique opportunity for Bangladesh's RMG sector to cement its position as a global leader in sustainable manufacturing. With the highest number of LEED-certified green factories globally, Bangladesh has already shown its commitment to environmental stewardship. The CSDDD could act as a catalyst for further innovation, encouraging factories to adopt circular economy principles, minimise waste, and invest in energy-efficient technologies. Factories that achieve compliance will not only retain access to EU markets but also enhance their reputation as ethical, sustainable suppliers, attracting additional business opportunities.

To adapt to the CSDDD, Bangladesh's RMG sector must act decisively. Investments in capacity-building initiatives are critical to equipping factory owners and workers with the tools to meet compliance requirements. Digital transformation will play a pivotal role, with technologies like blockchain and AI providing solutions for supply chain transparency and risk management. Collaboration will be equally important, with brands, suppliers, and governments needing to share the costs and benefits of compliance. Policy support, such as financial incentives and infrastructure development, can help SMEs navigate this transition.

The CSDDD is more than a directive; it marks the dawn of a new era of accountability and transparency. For Bangladesh's RMG sector, it is both a challenge and an opportunity to lead the way in ethical and sustainable manufacturing.

The author is a former director of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association

EU to invest €200b in AI

AFP, *Paris*

EU chief Ursula von der Leyen Tuesday announced a push to channel 200 billion euros in public and private investments into Europe's nascent artificial intelligence industry.

"We aim to mobilise a total of 200 billion euros for AI investments in Europe," the European Commission president told a Paris AI summit, saying the EU would contribute 50 billion euros with the rest pledged by "providers, investors and industry."

Europe faces an uphill challenge as the United States and China charge ahead in the AI field, but von der Leyen insisted "the AI race is far from over".

"We want to accelerate innovation," she told the gathering of leaders and tech executives, declaring that "global leadership is still up for grabs".

The EU investment push would include 20 billion euros to finance four AI gigafactories, "to allow open, collaborative development of the most complex AI models," a commission statement said.

The initial EU funding will be drawn from existing programmes with a digital component.

Von der Leyen said the European funds would "top up" pledges announced Monday by a group of more than 60 European companies such as Airbus, Volkswagen and Mistral AI.

The firms said they aimed to stimulate the emergence of new companies, with 150 billion euros "earmarked" by international investors for AI-related opportunities in Europe over five years as part of the "EU AI Champions Initiative".

Canada, Mexico, EU slam 'unjustified' Trump steel tariffs

AFP, *Paris*

Canada, Mexico and the EU on Tuesday slammed US President Donald Trump's "unjustified" decision to impose tariffs on steel and aluminium imports, which has raised fears of a broader trade war.

Trump signed executive orders to impose 25 percent tariffs on imports of the metals starting March 12, triggering a flurry of angry reactions.

The European Union and Canada vowed to retaliate firmly.

Such tariffs would be "entirely unjustified", Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said at an artificial intelligence conference in Paris.

"Our response will of course be firm and clear," Trudeau told AFP, as Canadian steelmakers warned of "massive" disruption from Trump's move.

In Mexico -- the third-largest steel exporter to the United States, after Canada and Brazil -- a top minister urged Trump not to "destroy" four decades of North American trade ties.

Economy Minister Marcelo Ebrard said the balance of trade in steel and aluminium between Mexico and the United States was in Washington's favour by almost $6.9 billion in 2024, and tariffs were therefore "not justified".

In Brussels, European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen warned that "unjustified tariffs on the EU... will trigger firm and proportionate countermeasures".

EU trade ministers will discuss the 27-country bloc's next steps in a video conference Wednesday, while Trudeau will separately discuss strategy with top officials in Brussels.

Brazil, for its part, said it had no intention of entering into a trade war with the United States, despite President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva having vowed reciprocation if Trump imposed tariffs.

A worker moves steel products at North York Iron, a steel supplier in Toronto, on Tuesday. Donald Trump signed executive orders to impose 25 percent tariffs on imports of the metal starting on March 12.

PHOTO: AFP

South Korea, the fourth-biggest steel exporter to the United States, also vowed to protect its companies' interests.

Acting President Choi Sang-mok said Seoul would seek to reduce uncertainties "by building a close relationship with the Trump administration and expanding diplomatic options".

A spokesman for British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said London was "engaging with our US counterparts to work through the detail" of the tariffs.

Britain's steel industry body called the tariff plan a "devastating blow", while its European counterpart said it would worsen "an already dire market environment".

In Monday's executive order, Trump said "all imports of aluminium articles and derivative aluminium articles from Argentina, Australia, Canada, Mexico, EU countries, and the UK" will be subject to additional tariffs.

The same countries are named in his executive order on steel, along with Brazil, Japan and South Korea.

Trump said he was "simplifying" US tariffs, adding: "It's 25 percent without exceptions or exemptions."