Ministry opts to hand over New Mooring Container Terminal to CPA

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Ctg*

The authorities have decided in principle to let the Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) take charge of the New Mooring Container Terminal (NCT) for six months amid opposition from major political parties to appointing a foreign operator.

Currently, a private operator is running the NCT, the largest terminal at Chattogram port. Its contract will expire on July 6.

With the deadline nearing, the Ministry of Shipping held a meeting last Wednesday where it decided in principle to hand over operations to the CPA, according to an official document.

Subsequently, the CPA has sought final approval from the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs through the shipping ministry.

In a letter, the CPA pointed to the contract's looming expiry, the lengthy process of selecting a new operator, and the need to keep external trade running smoothly. It urged swift approval in the national interest.

The NCT has been making headlines in recent months over who would run it.

The government said that bringing in a well-known foreign operator would increase the overall efficiency of the port.

But parties including the BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami, and left-leaning groups oppose the idea, arguing that giving control of a key terminal to a foreign firm would endanger national security and sovereignty.

Port workers have also been protesting, saying the move would make little economic sense as the terminal is "profitable and fully functional".

Built at a cost of Tk 2,000 crore, the 950-metre terminal was completed in 2007 by the CPA.

It has five jetties — four for ocean-going container ships and one for smaller vessels that connect to Pangaon port in Dhaka.

The Daily Star approached top CPA officials for comment, but to no avail.

CPA spokesperson and acting secretary Md Nasir Uddin did not answer repeated phone calls.

Currently, a private operator is running the New Mooring Container Terminal, the largest terminal at Chattogram port. Its contract will expire on July 6. PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Why local garment industry must go nano

MD MANJURUL AHSAN

The rhythmic clatter of sewing machines may still define Bangladesh's garment factories, but in the near future, that familiar sound could fade beneath the shimmer of self-cleaning fabrics and the quiet of nanotechnology at work.

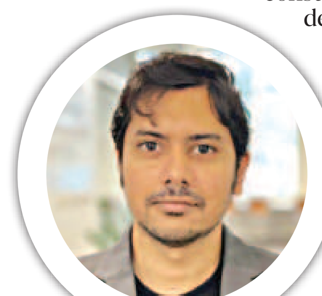
As global apparel production enters a new era of advanced materials and smart design, nanotechnology, engineering at the molecular level, is set to transform what garments are, not just how they are made. For Bangladesh, the world's second-largest apparel exporter, the question is no longer whether to adopt nanotech, but how quickly it can catch up.

Nanotechnology may sound futuristic, but it is already here. It is woven into the fibres of jackets that never need washing, T-shirts that repel coffee spills, and hospital garments that kill bacteria on contact. These nano-enhanced fabrics retain their natural texture, weight and breathability while adding remarkable functions such as water resistance, stain repellency, UV protection and antimicrobial properties. By creating an ultra-rough surface at the microscopic level, these fabrics cause liquids to bead up and roll off.

The result? Higher-value, longer-lasting and smarter clothing, precisely what premium markets are willing to pay more for.

And the market is growing fast. According to Research and Markets, the global nanotechnology clothing industry is projected to reach $12.1 billion by 2025, growing at nearly 25 percent a year. Leading this shift are countries such as the United States, Germany, China and Japan.

If Bangladesh wants to remain competitive globally, not just as a mass producer but as an innovation leader, it must act now.



The global apparel narrative is shifting. Western consumers and buyers increasingly demand not only ethical labour and sustainability, but also performance and personalisation. While Bangladesh's ready-made garment sector still relies on low-cost labour and bulk output, that model is wearing thin.

Nations that integrate technology are moving up the value chain, earning more by producing less, but producing smarter. For Bangladesh, the current formula of "more shirts for less" is becoming obsolete.

The integration of nanotechnology offers a way forward. By transitioning towards smart textiles, Bangladesh can expand into high-margin sectors such as sportswear, outdoor gear, military-grade fabrics, medical apparel and sustainable fashion. These are not niche markets; they represent the future of global clothing demand.

Of course, embracing nanotech will not be easy. It will require investment in research and development, collaboration between universities and the private sector, and a shift in mindset from low-cost production to value-driven innovation.

But we do not have to stay behind.

Some Bangladeshi factories are already experimenting with artificial intelligence and Internet of Things technologies. The next step is to incorporate nanotech at scale, partnering with global research hubs, forming public-private partnerships, and integrating nano-capable processes into textile parks and export processing zones.

The government should provide fiscal incentives and regulatory frameworks that attract nanotech investment while ensuring worker safety and environmental compliance.

It is also essential to train a new generation of textile engineers and workers who can navigate these emerging technologies. Just as we once trained millions to operate sewing machines, we must now train thousands to work with smart fibres, specialised coatings and responsive materials.

The stakes are high. Bangladesh's garment industry employs over four million workers and contributes more than 80 percent of the country's export earnings. But its dominance is under threat, from rising regional competitors, changing buyer demands, climate compliance pressures and automation-driven job loss. The nano revolution offers not only a way to stay relevant but also a chance to redefine Bangladesh's leadership in global fashion manufacturing.

Imagine a future where labels read not just "Made in Bangladesh" but "Engineered in Bangladesh". That future is within reach, but only if we act boldly today.

The choice is clear: nano or nowhere.

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South Korea counts on shipbuilding to ease US tariff woes

AFP, *Seoul*

Asia's fourth largest economy South Korea is facing gruelling tariffs by US President Donald Trump, but its shipbuilding industry could prove a useful bargaining chip.

Already hit by sector levies on steel and car exports, Seoul is laser-focused on negotiations over a 25 percent country-specific tariff that has been suspended until July 8.

AFP takes a look at what's going on:

In the 1970s, South Korea's military leader president Park Chung-hee accelerated the country's heavy industry, designating sectors such as steel and shipbuilding "strategically important" and rolling out state subsidies.

At the same time, POSCO was founded -- now one of the world's largest steel producers -- and conglomerate Hyundai built its shipyard in southeastern Ulsan, which started to grow rapidly.

European rivals struggled to keep pace.

Sweden's Kockums Shipyard filed for bankruptcy in 1987 -- and in a symbolic shift of global shipbuilding power, Hyundai acquired its 140-metre (460-foot) Goliath crane for one dollar. It now towers over southern Ulsan.

This photo shows a general view of an under-construction Maersk triple-E class container ship at the Daewoo DSME shipyard in Okpo, 60km south of Busan. PHOTO: AFP/FILE

In the 1990s and 2000s, South Korean shipbuilders such as Hyundai Heavy Industries and Samsung Heavy Industries ramped up investment in research and development, backed by generous government subsidies.

The country secured a competitive edge in high-value-added vessels, including LNG carriers, very large crude carriers, and offshore platforms.

Now, South Korea ranks as the world's second-largest shipbuilding nation, trailing only behind China.

South Korea's exports hit a record high in 2024, with analysts pointing to shipbuilding as one of the key drivers.

The sector accounted for nearly four percent of total exports and grew by almost 20 percent from the previous year -- reaching $25.6 billion.

Shipbuilding directly employs around 120,000 workers -- roughly one percent of the country's total workforce -- with indirect employment significantly higher in industrial hubs like Ulsan.

Industry data shows so far this year, new orders have exceeded 13 trillion won ($9.4 billion).

In March, Hanwha Ocean secured a landmark $1.6 billion contract to build LNG carriers for Taiwan's Evergreen Marine, one of the largest single orders in the sector this year.

Trump has showed "significant interest in South Korea-US shipbuilding cooperation," said South Korea's trade, industry and energy minister Ahn Duk-geun in April.

Like the Europeans, the US shipbuilding industry has lagged behind South Korea and China, and as a result, the sector is seen as a "highly important bargaining chip in trade negotiations," he added.

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China may win more than EU from auto tariff truce

REUTERS, *London/Hong Kong*

A détente in the electric vehicle tariff war may suit China more than Europe. Brussels and Beijing are haggling over a way for Chinese manufacturers to sell battery rides tariff-free, but at a minimum price. Embracing such a system would be a risky move.

Europe's electric-vehicle tariffs are barely a year old. Brussels added extra levies of up to 35 percent to offset the competitive advantages that made-in-China vehicles get from government subsidies or cheap labour. Now, the People's Republic is pushing an alternative: rather than duties levied on imports, carmakers would commit to not sell below a certain price, a model used before with solar panels.

Such a system could have benefits. Chinese manufacturers would not have to absorb the burden of levies through discounted prices. Europe, meanwhile, would be able to mollify Beijing and so avoid tit-for-tat tariffs on cognac and other exports, but still stop it dumping cars on the cheap. The latter is a potential mortal threat to Renault or Volkswagen. Last year, the Middle Kingdom exported some 1.25 million electric vehicles, more than half of the total production in Europe, as per International Energy Agency data.

Look beneath the hood, however, and there are issues. Europe would probably want to find a level that reflects the extent of subsidies enjoyed by each carmaker, as it did with tariffs.

A single tariff, likely China's preferred option, would be less precise. Either way, establishing a minimum floor for a complex vehicle with many moving parts would be challenging.

It could also quickly become obsolete. Renault and Volkswagen are launching cheaper EV models to compete with China, and changes in battery technology will lower costs. A floor could reduce the incentive to innovate.

Enforcement looks a bigger headache. Tariffs have the virtue of simplicity. Yet car prices are fluid: dealers offer discounts, and incentives such as cheap loans. And China's carmakers are already masters at bundling products to make their wares more attractive at home. BYD includes its "God's Eye" assisted driving software for all vehicles priced above 100,000 yuan (less than $10,000). Carmakers at April's Shanghai auto show touted perks such as multiple screens and built-in kitchenettes. Nio owners have access to the brand's clubhouses.

As such, European carmakers may still be undercut by Chinese rivals, incentivising production in China. True, Europe could impose minimum import quotas, as it did with Japan in the 1980s. Or it could set the price floor high but still impose tariffs below that level. But overall, minimum pricing may be the cost Europe must bear to maintain relations with Beijing and secure access to rare earths – meaning China would most likely be the winner.

Investors brace for oil price spike, rush to havens

US attack on Iran would cause a selloff in stock markets, they say

REUTERS, *New York*

A US attack on Iranian nuclear sites could push oil prices even higher and trigger a knee-jerk rush to safety, investors said, as they assessed how the latest escalation of tensions would ripple through the global economy.

The reaction in Middle East stock markets, which trade on Sunday, suggested investors were assuming a benign scenario, even as Iran intensified its missile attacks on Israel in response to the sudden, deep US involvement in the conflict.

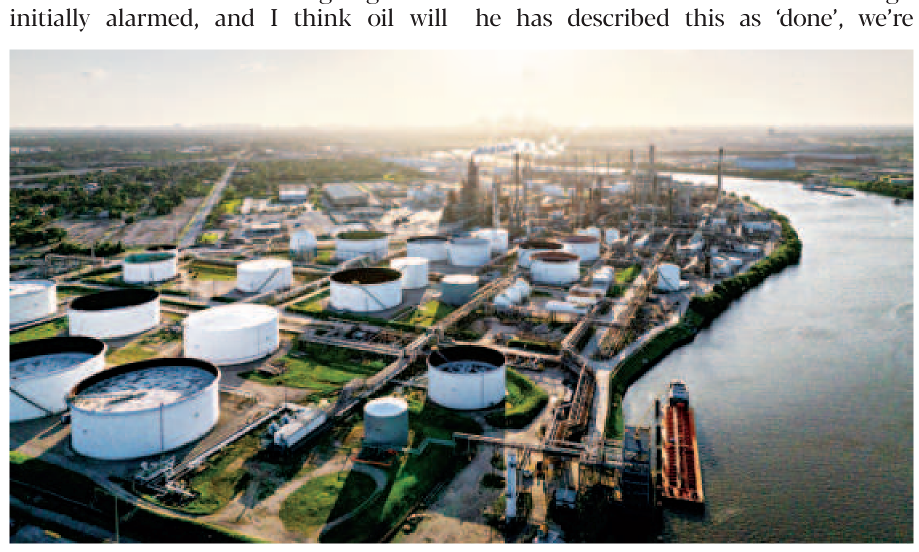
Trump called the attack "a spectacular military success" in a televised address to the nation and said Iran's "key nuclear enrichment facilities have been completely and totally obliterated". He said the US military could go after other targets in Iran if the country did not agree to peace.

Iran said it reserves all options to defend itself, and warned of "everlasting consequences".

Investors said they expected the US involvement would cause a selloff in stock markets and a possible bid for the dollar and other safe-haven assets when major markets reopen, but also said much uncertainty about the course of the conflict remained.

"I think the markets are going to be initially alarmed, and I think oil will open higher," said Mark Spindel, chief investment officer at Potomac River Capital.

"We don't have any damage assessment and that will take some time. Even though he has described this as 'done', we're engaged. What comes next?" Spindel said.



In an aerial view, the LyondellBasell Houston refinery is seen at sunset on June 18 in Houston, Texas. The global benchmark Brent crude futures have risen as much as 18 percent since June 10, hitting a near five-month high of $79.04 on Thursday. PHOTO: AFP

"I think the uncertainty is going to blanket the markets, as now Americans everywhere are going to be exposed. It's going to raise uncertainty and volatility, particularly in oil," he added.

One indicator of how markets will react in the coming week was the price of ether, the second-largest cryptocurrency and the new gauge of retail investor sentiment after bitcoin , which is now held largely by institutions.

Ether was down 5 percent on Sunday, taking losses since the first Israeli strikes on Iran on June 13 to 13 percent.

Most Gulf stock markets, however, seemed unconcerned by the early morning attacks, with the main indexes in Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait up slightly and Israel's Tel Aviv main index at an all-time high.

OIL PRICES, INFLATION

A key concern for markets would center around the potential impact of the developments in the Middle East on oil prices and thus on inflation. A rise in inflation could dampen consumer confidence and lessen the chance of near-term interest rate cuts.

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