

Crane accident hampers container handling at Chittagong port



The derailed gantry crane at Chittagong port that led to congestion of container vessels.

By **Dwaipayan Barua**

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Container handling at Chittagong port has been badly hampered for the last four days following an accident during the berthing of a vessel at a jetty on June 25 which left two gantry cranes damaged.

Berthing has remained suspended at the jetty, one of the two at Chittagong Container Terminal (CCT), leading to a congestion of container vessels waiting at sea.

An Egyptian flagged container vessel, Xpress Suez, hit two of four gantry cranes positioned over rail tracks at CCT jetty no. 3, said sources in Chittagong Port Authority (CPA).

One gantry crane was derailed while parts of another got broken, they said.

Both cranes remained out of order since then and it would take a long time to repair them, they added. The Chittagong port, with these four gantry cranes, can handle containers from two gearless vessels (those with no cranes on board) at a time at two jetties of CCT.

Meanwhile containers can be handled from eight geared vessels (with container handling equipment like cranes on board) in the conventional way in eight other operational container jetties including four in New Mooring Container Terminal (NCT) and six jetties in General Cargo Berth (GCB) areas.

Officials are now planning to use the affected jetty to handle geared vessels.

CPA Member (admin and planning) Md Zafar Alam said they have already contacted manufacturing firm Mitsubishi for the repairs.

Hoping that the situation would not turn for the worse, Alam said they would encourage liners to bring geared vessels while the repairs were ongoing.

Meanwhile, the congestion of vessels has been affecting the port for the last couple of months mainly for an influx of seasonal imports ahead of Ramadan and the national budget, reduced operational hours during Ramadan, unfavourable monsoon weather and cyclonic storms like Mora as well as a shortage of equipment.

According to the traffic department of CPA, 22 container vessels were waiting at the outer anchorage for getting berth till yesterday morning.

Mainline operators, shipping agents as well as businesspeople expressed anxiety over the situation.

A vessel, MV Komati, left the port yesterday, a day after its scheduled departure, leaving behind over 100 export containers as those could not be loaded onto the ship on time, said sources.

Shahed Sarwar, executive director of K Line Bangladesh Limited, said one of their gearless vessels is scheduled to arrive at the outer anchorage on June 2.

Sarwar thinks that the vessel needs to wait at sea for at least 10 days to get a berth at the lone jetty.

“We have to cancel the next voyage of the vessel as it is taking much time in this port. We will incur a huge loss if we have to cancel a trip,” he added.

Chittagong port is the principal port of Bangladesh that handled 80 percent of the country's export-import trade worth around \$75 billion in 2016-17.

The port has handled nearly 20 lakh twenty-foot equivalent unit (TUEs) of containers in 2015-16, according to CPA statistics.

