

Singapore port's cargo volume up 4.6% in first 5 months of year

This comes despite Covid-19 disruptions, Suez Canal incident earlier this year

Kok Yufeng

The Port of Singapore has bounced back from a pandemic-induced slowdown, handling more cargo in the first five months of this year than in the same periods of 2020 and 2019.

Amid port closures overseas, shipping delays and a global container shortage, container throughput here fell by 0.9 per cent for the whole of last year, said Senior Minister of State for Transport Chee Hong Tat yesterday.

He was speaking at the launch of the Smart Port Challenge 2021.

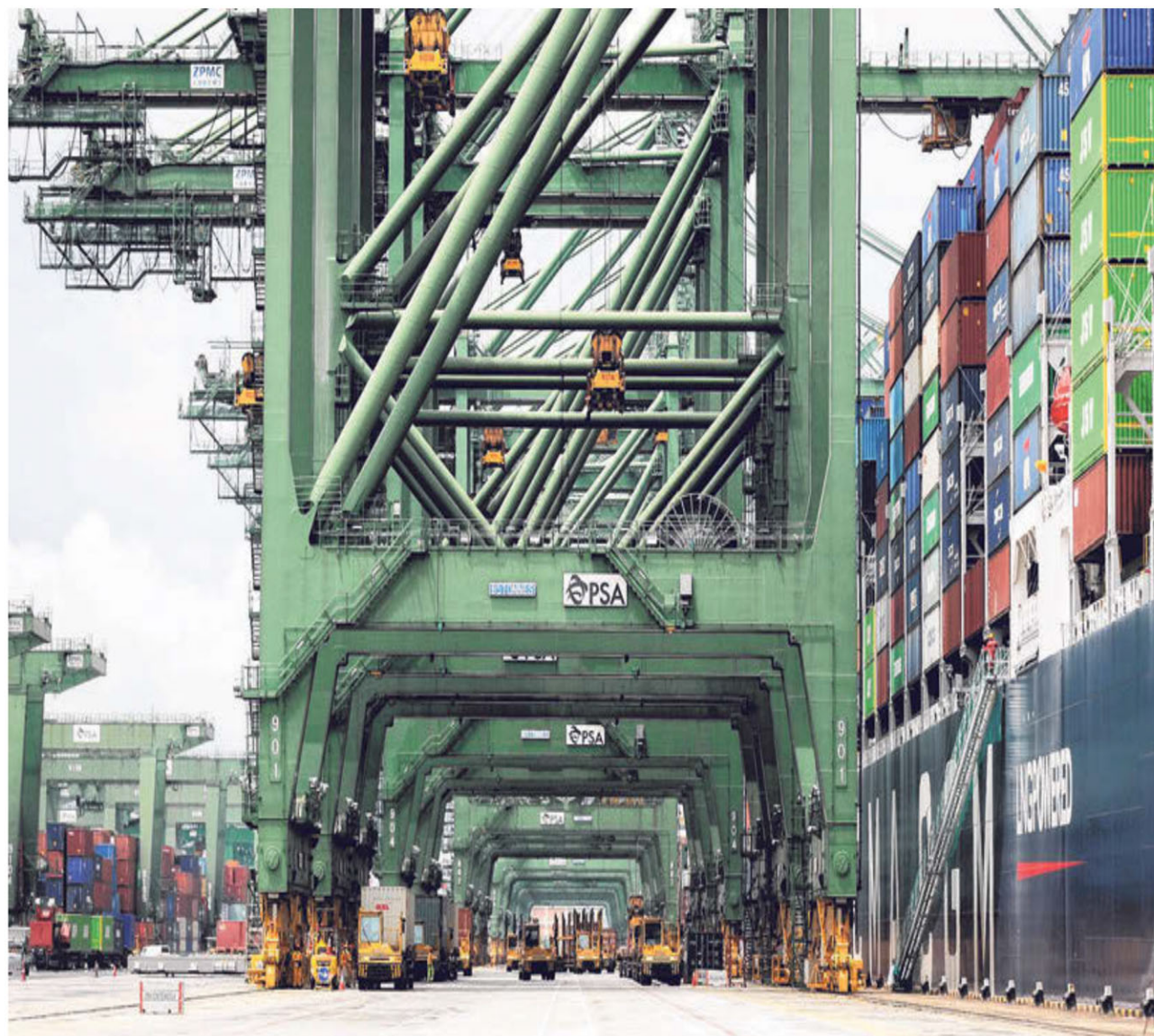
The port here regained momentum in the second half of last year, Mr Chee said. Container throughput has since grown by 4.6 per cent from January to May this year compared with the same period last year, and by 3.9 per cent compared with the same period in 2019, prior to the pandemic.

"Neither Covid-19 nor the Suez Canal incident earlier this year prevented us from growing our port operations," Mr Chee added.

The investment pipeline for Singapore's maritime sector has also remained healthy amid the pandemic. Last year, 11 new shipping groups set up shop here and eight maritime companies expanded their operations.

In the first five months of this year, five maritime firms here either expanded operations or established new ones with support from the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore (MPA).

Mr Chee said: "We must not rest on our laurels. We should ride on this momentum to build even



The Port of Singapore has bounced back after port closures overseas, shipping delays and a global container shortage saw container throughput here fall by 0.9 per cent for the whole of last year. In addition, five maritime firms here either expanded operations or established new ones this year. ST PHOTO: GAVIN FOO

stronger capabilities and position ourselves to grow further."

One way to do this is through innovation, Mr Chee added, citing how the Port of Singapore had implemented contactless cargo and bunkering operations and provided telemedicine services for seafarers during the pandemic.

Demand for such technological solutions is expected to continue to rise and Singapore is well-placed to develop its marine tech sector, he said.

The Smart Port Challenge, now

in its fifth edition, has become a key pillar of this effort.

Organised by Port Innovation Ecosystem Reimagined @ Block71, a collaboration between MPA and NUS Enterprise, the challenge puts up problem statements and aims to identify and fund technology start-ups that can solve them.

Past participants include BeeX, which specialises in autonomous underwater robots to inspect piers and vessels, and Portcast, which developed a platform that can predict global container movements.

There are 17 challenge statements this year covering concerns such as sustainability and crew safety. Start-ups have until Aug 10 to submit their proposals.

Finalists will be eligible to apply for a grant of up to \$50,000 to pilot their projects. Seven of last year's participants, including BeeX, have been awarded this grant.

In all, about \$2 million in grant funding has been given out so far.

A further \$10 million has been set aside to drive the growth of such marine tech companies here.

MPA has also been partnering venture capital firms to provide seed funding for start-ups, with \$50 million in co-investment funds up for grabs last year.

This year, another three firms have come on board, bringing \$30 million in potential funding.

Mr Chee said the authorities must also provide marine tech firms with access to talent.

MPA will partner employers, the Singapore Shipping Association and trade unions to implement new company training committee



GEAR UP FOR GROWTH

We must not rest on our laurels. We should ride on this momentum to build even stronger capabilities and position ourselves to grow further.



SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT CHEE HONG TAT, on how the Port of Singapore has bounced back from a pandemic-induced slowdown.

initiatives to help small and medium-sized enterprises in the maritime sector with digitalisation and training plans for workers.

MPA and the Singapore Maritime Officers' Union will also organise discussions with maritime firms, focusing on digitalisation, upskilling workers and attracting more Singaporeans to the sector.

Said Mr Chee: "This is like adding a new propeller to our ship so that it can go faster and sail further."

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