Chittagong-bound cargoes. The imposition of such additional charge tarnishes the image of the port abroad. As a result, the port is termed as one of the worst performing ports of the world. The donor agencies are very critical about the performance of the port.

Criticizing the performance of the ports in Bangladesh, the World Bank, in its report on strategic issues in ports, said that the port sector had not changed much over the past decade:

"All three major ports [Chittagong, Mongla, and river port of Dhaka-Narayanganj] suffer from overstaffing, labour strikes, cumbersome customs procedures, outdated and inefficient work rules and outdated and inflexible management practices."

Although Chittagong sea port is heavily congested and overburdened, and Mongla is diminishing, there is hardly any initiative from the government side to set up a new sea port. The government's plan to set up a deep-sea sea port is unlikely to become reality in the near future.

Problems

The premier sea port, Chittagong, is located on the right bank of the river Karnaphuli. Its actual position is nine nautical miles inside the estuary. The port is faced with multiple problems.

First of all, it is a tidal port. The ships have to cross a nine nautical mile long channel for anchoring at the terminal. The ships can move on the channel only during high tide. Chittagong port now has three terminals. General yard for anchoring bulk carrier ships, container terminal for anchoring container ships, and a newly built new-mooring container terminal (NCT).

The port has the facilities for anchoring 10-12 ships at those three terminals at a time. The Chittagong Container Terminal (CCT) has the most sophisticated equipment, quay gantry cranes (QGC), for handling containers. The four QGCs were installed last year, at a cost of Tk 150 crore. The container handling at the CCT has been accelerated after installing sophisticated cranes. The ship-to-shore crane is used for unloading containers directly from a ship and keeping it in a certain place on the shore. This sophisticated crane has been imported from Japan. Japanese technicians installed it at the terminal and gave training to the local operators for running the cranes.

The premier Chittagong port is still plagued by lack of adequate equipment, inefficient operators and labourers, and lengthy system of cargo releasing. As a result, the cargo handling at the port is very slow. According to a recent study by the Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry, (CCI) the ship operators suffered $286 million loss during the financial year 2005-2006, only because of delay in discharging cargo.

The actual loss to the nation for the delay had been 200 times higher than the amount, as the delay at the port shattered the total economy of the country, the CCI leaders said.

Turn-around time

Turn-around time is a very common



ZOBAER HOSSAIN SIKDER