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break down. The laden containers often remain piled up at the depot because of poor handling. The government is now considering cancellation of the agreement and appointment of a new company for smooth handling of goods.

Dream of a deep sea port

The nation has been dreaming of a multi-billion dollar sea port in the country since independence. But that never became reality. Successive governments made commitments and took up plans. But those plans got shelved and never saw the light.

There is also a strong debate on the possible location for the deep sea port. The people and political leadership are divided into two groups for bringing the location of the port in their favour. They have mobilized people and created pressure on the government to select the location according to their choice.

The local political leaders of Chittagong and Cox's Bazar have been demanding that the deep sea port be set up in Moheskhali-Kutubdia.

On the other hand, the leaders of Khulna and Bagerhat region want the port at Akram point, 60 kilometres down from the Mongla port on the river Pashur.

Without opening doors for land-locked neighbours like Nepal, Bhutan, the north-eastern provinces of India and the western part of China, a deep sea port is unlikely to be viable in Bangladesh. No foreign investor would come up to invest in a multi-billion dollar project aimed only at Bangladesh-bound cargo.

The government last year appointed a foreign firm to conduct a feasibility study for setting up a deep-sea port in Bangladesh. The study is suppose to continue for one year, and after that a concrete recommendations would be submitted to the government suggesting the suitable place for the port.

But nobody knows when the concept of deep sea port would finally come into being.

The first Nobel laureate of the country Dr. Muhammad Yunus has also demanded setting up of a mega-port in Chittagong for exploring the potential of the area and bringing economic development.

The development of Dhaka-Chittagong economic corridor mainly depends on a vibrant port, particularly a deep-sea port located somewhere in the eastern part of the country. The lands located on both sides of Dhaka - Chittagong highway are supposed to be used as the base land for the corridor.

A gigantic port is necessary for quick disposal of export-import items of the corridor. Besides, neighbouring India, Nepal, Bhutan and China could be used as hinterland for the port.

Implementing the dream and developing a vibrant port in the region demands a dramatic change in the mind-set of the policy makers, and massive reimagining of current government rules and regulations.

Without opening doors for land-locked neighbours like Nepal, Bhutan, the north-eastern provinces of India and the western part of China, a deep sea port is unlikely to be viable in Bangladesh. No foreign investor would come up to invest in a multi-billion dollar project aimed only at Bangladesh-bound cargo. But they might be very much interested if a regional trade atmosphere is created through political decisions of the states.

The requirement of money for such a massive infrastructure may be fulfilled from donor agencies or foreign investment, but a political decision first of all is pre-requisite for changing the mind-set and rethinking tight rules.

Many countries in the world like Singapore earn billions of dollars annually through their sea ports. Bangladesh could also go for such a scheme through building massive infrastructure and opening the door for our neighbours.

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