

Time to Move



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Fast track to transit

RAISUL HUQ BAHAR, *Chittagong*

THE Chittagong Port Authority has taken up a massive programme to revamp itself appropriately for giving transit facilities to neighbouring countries.

The revamp includes enhancing the port's functionality through expanding infrastructural installations, procuring state-of-the-art equipment for loading and unloading shipments of cargo and containers.

CPA has designed a detailed three-pronged project for the purpose.

The other vitally important undertaking that awaits implementation is revising and updating rules and regulations, and improving administrative and institutional capacities of the CPA.

A CPA official said 18 projects involving Tk 2,100 crore were taken up to be implemented by 2013. Authorities are keen about adhering to the deadline by ensuring strict supervision and monitoring.

Mosharrif Hossain, member (finance) of CPA, said they have taken every step to cope with the needs of providing transit facilities to the neighbouring countries, where infrastructural expansion tops the list.

"Chittagong port is all set to give transit to its neighbouring

Once constructed, the proposed Tk 820 crore terminal will substantially enhance the port's operational ability



ANURUP KANTI DAS

A shed of Chittagong Port has primarily been selected as a transit yard to be used by neighbouring countries.

countries following the government's political decision," he said.

Hossain reiterated that the CPA's prime duty was to implement government decision for the greater benefit of the country. The projects have to be implemented by maintaining the highest international standards, he added.

The CPA held a meeting on March 31 to discuss the pros and cons of transit and transshipment. The meeting took note of the port's development projects.

It was decided in the meeting that a 'transit yard' earmarked for use by the neigh-

bouring countries near the north and east CPA residential areas would be constructed.

The cost of constructing the yard as per international standards was estimated at Tk 150 crore.

The residents of the mentioned CPA colonies, however, are unhappy over the decision as the residential character and environment of the areas would be threatened.

No follow-up on the development activities was possible due to exigencies of the day-to-day operations, said a CPA source.

Fakhru Islam, a trade union leader and resident of East

Colony, said, "We are in favour of transit. We want the special yard for it."

"It should be constructed on the vast sprawling southern grounds, which are mostly unutilised. The single storey British model bungalows there are just a colonial hangover."

"We should pull them down and construct the yard there. The residents of those houses should be shifted to high-rise apartments."

The CPA many a time discussed the matter of shifting the colony residents to more suitable areas and utilising the land for back-up facilities, as it

is near the general cargo berths of the port.

Syed Farhaduddin Ahmed, secretary of CPA, said the CPA master plan also indicates the colony residents should have been shifted and the land used as a yard as well as for other back-up facilities.

"We have a master plan to shift the residents of the colony to high-rise apartments in order to use the land for port operations. The CPA's engineering department is detailing out the project," he said.

Ahmed said another project named Karnaphuli Container Terminal (KCT) is under active

consideration by the government. Once constructed, the proposed Tk 820 crore terminal will substantially enhance the port's operational ability, he added.

It may be mentioned that during Bangladeshi prime minister's New Delhi visit in January, a joint communiqué was issued.

Signed by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her Indian counterpart Manmohan Singh, the joint communiqué agrees that the two countries will give transit facilities to each other and also to other neighbouring countries like Nepal, Bhutan, China and Myanmar.



ANURUP KANTI DAS

An independent administrator for CPA?

As the Chittagong Port prepares to deal with transit shipments, The Daily Star caught up with Nasir Uddin Chowdhury, first vice president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association and a member of Chittagong Port Users' Forum. Here is his take on the hot-button issue.

ARUN BIKASH DEY

What sort of difficulties do you face in using the port?

The main problem with Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) is that efficiency is not increasing as required.

The port runs short of equipment, and the equipment available is not used properly. Dysfunctional equipment is not being replaced either.

The port should procure modern equipment. User parties await permission to use the private equipment. We, therefore, are deprived of quicker services, when required.

Time loss is a major factor, especially in the case of readymade garments. The consignment that we should be able to deliver within a day, takes three days now. We would be benefited more if goods were delivered even an hour early.

Are you satisfied with the present management of the port?

CPA needs a good management system. Discipline needs to be developed and heightened in port operations.

The port falls far behind in standards, compared to other modern ports in the world. If we want to reach the standards of any modern port, like Singapore, we'll need revolutionary changes in terms of management here.

Pro-active decisions are also needed here.

Management should keep in mind that Chittagong port is the mainstay of the country's economy. If decisions can be taken rapidly and implemented effectively, our port will turn into a modern port, I gather.

What initiatives can be taken to improve workers' skills?

Policy changes are required. Effective policies should be adopted to encourage workers to increase their professional skills. The skilled workers need to be appreciated duly, because appreciation makes a worker more sincere and eager. Some policy changes are required for this.

As a port user, are you satisfied with the present ability to handle container?

The port's container handling capacity has to be increased. It should be more systematic.

What are your observations on port workers' dissatisfaction?

Our workers are very simple. Middlemen might be present, who use the workers to create unrest in the port, just to satisfy their own ill motives. But most workers remain unaware.

The workers should be treated humanly and provided with their dues. Management needs to look at their grievances by paying more attention.

What is the role of the New Mooring Container Terminal in the development of our economy?

The New Mooring Container Terminal (NMCT) should come into operation as soon as possible and it will certainly facilitate our economy to flourish.

It is a matter of great regret that the NMCT now hangs in limbo because of bureaucratic tangles.



Nasir Uddin Chowdhury

What is your take on giving transit to our neighbours through Chittagong port?

I appreciate it, but the port is not ready at the moment to facilitate such services. The CPA is currently failing to provide the domestic users with services properly.

How does CPA propose to offer proper services to foreigners with the present infrastructure?

Before giving transit, we have to develop infrastructure. The Dhaka-Chittagong highway has to be made into four-lanes. The capacity of the port must be increased further as well.

What do you suggest to make the port more efficient?

Firstly, the port needs a capable administrator. The administrator should also have the authority to make decisions independently. S/he must be allowed a logical period of time to prove his/her worth.

The administrator should take up a challenge, to turn the port into a modern one, like Singapore, within an agreed period of time.

A modern port must employ a knowledgeable, modern and independent administrator.

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