

Round Table Discussion on “Port in Crisis: Ways of Overcome” held on 24 March, 2018 at Chittagong



SCB Chairman Md. Rezaul Karim (middle) is seen giving welcome speech at the Round Table Discussion on “Port in Crisis: Ways of Overcome” held on 24 March, 2018 at Chittagong Club Sports Auditorium, Chittagong.

A Round Table Discussion on “Port in Crisis: Ways of Overcome” organised by Shippers Council of Bangladesh (SCB) was held on 24 March, 2018 at Chittagong Club Sports Auditorium, Chittagong.

The meeting was chaired by SCB Chairman Md. Rezaul Karim. He welcomed the speakers and said “Bangladesh has achieved the eligibility of graduation from LDC’s to a developing Country under the dynamic leadership of Hon’ble Prime Minister Shaikh Hasina. To meet the challenges for staying developing country, our main sea port will have to be strengthened. Because 92 per cent of sea-borne trade including import-export takes place through the Chittagong port, the country’s main gateway. The country’s trade is largely dependent on the development of the Chittagong Port. In the past, this port was quite ahead in its own terms but it is now lagging behind compared to the economic growth of the country. As a result, the congestion of vessels and containers at the port had become unavoidable. Businessmen were incurring losses, resulting in price increases and the consumers were the ultimate sufferers”, Mr. Karim felt today’s discussion is very much appropriate.

The meeting was moderated by Mamun Abdullah, head of news, Independent Television. Dr Ahsan H Mansur, Executive Director of 'Policy Research Institute' (PRI), presented the key note speech titled 'Ports in Crisis: Ways of Overcome' before the participants through power-point presentation. He put up different aspects of Chittagong Port and the country’s prime airport Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka. He said import and export through the Chittagong port increased by 14 and 12.4 per cent compared to 2016 and

2017 fiscal year but total container traffic volume was the lowest compared to Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam.

He also said the Chittagong Container Terminal (CCT)



operations were hampered by the direct delivery of export containers to the quay having limited area and the lack of export stowage planning, leading to low crane productivity and long vessel waiting time.

Among the speakers were: Former advisor to a caretaker government Hossain Zillur Rahman, Monjurul Ahsan Bulbul, president of the Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ), BSM Group president Abul Bashar Chowdhury, Center for Police Dialogue Director Dr Khondaker Golam Moazzem, CPA Former Chairman Rear Admiral Reaz Uddin Ahmed, Customs Additional Commissioner Nahida Faridi, Former, First-Vice President of the BGMEA Nasir Uddin Chowdhury, C & F Agents Association President AKM Aktar Hossain, Shipping Agents Association Chairman Ahsanul Haq Chowdhury, Director, SCB Syed Md. Bakhtiar, among others.

SCB Senior Vice Chairman Ariful Ahsan and Directors Afsar Uddin Ahmed, Arzu Rahman Bhuyian, AKM Aminul Mannan (Khokon), Ziaul Islam and Md. Nurussafa Babu also attended the meeting.

Addressing the seminar, CPA former Chairman Reaz Uddin stressed the need for engaging foreign operating agencies for increasing capability of the port in container handling keeping pace with the fast moving world. He also projected a bright future of the country's economy following introduction of Matarbari deep sea-port at Maheshkhali upazila in Cox's Bazar district.

CPA Member (Admin and Planning) Md. Zafar Alam in his speech said around 92 percent merchandise are exported and imported through the port and around 4,000 containers are handled at the port every day. The Port has already started constructing Patenga Container Terminal while construction of Laldia Terminal, Karnaphuli Terminal and Bay Terminal are in the process of finalisation. He also said some foreign vessels can't anchor at the port due to lack of sufficient depth in the river Karnaphuli.

Customs Additional Commissioner Nahida Faridi said they have already taken initiatives to accelerate activities of the customs to make the handling process of containers faster. She informed that the process for procuring 12 more scanners is going on to increase the existing capacity. The additional commissioner, however, alleged that inefficiency of the 17 off-docks is causing sufferings to the both exporters and importers.

Nasir Uddin Chowdhury, former first-vice president, BGMEA said "The port is not in a crisis, actually. We, the businessmen are in a crisis. Businessmen have to suffer because of a delay in implementing the decisions. The vessels have to stay at the jetties for over 23 days and we have to count losses. CPA is out of accountability," "The CPA earns Tk 1,000 crore every year. But those who pay the money have no representatives in CPA decision making process. So the problem has remained in the port," he added. He demanded the inclusion of their representatives at the time of taking any decision.

Dr. Khondaker Golam Moazzem, Research Director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said the problems of Chittagong Port and Chittagong Customs House remain despite improvement made by them over the recent times. "When we were eager to hear the stakeholders about policy guidelines we hear much about their day-to-day problems they are facing. The Chittagong Port Authority has taken a number of infrastructure development projects, though belatedly. These projects for cargo handling facilities should be expedited without facing any procedural delay,"

Former advisor to a caretaker government Hossain Zillur Rahman said the country's premier port and commercial hub

lag behind due to political indifference of major political parties.



After discussion the following recommendations have been made:

1. Chittagong port needs to start constructing the bay terminal immediately to meet the challenge.
2. A deep sea port is essential for cargo handling growth and reduce cost in the long term.
3. Building 'distribution parks' at airports, and land ports remains imperative. Goods can be delivered from bonded yards set up at ports-which may include area for lease to, or warehouses for freight forwarders. The container or products can be delivered to their respective management, who can thereby release their goods/products.
4. Given the limited space in handling vast amounts of goods, vertical warehouses instead of horizontal ones-can be built or developed.
5. An 'import yard' must be constructed at the Bay terminal for the handling of imports. Railways need to be constructed in order to facilitate the transfer of goods. This can alleviate congestion at the port, as well as in the city.
6. Warehouses and/or adequate storage facilities should be developed to handle the increasing load of (international) cargo at HSIA airport.
7. To increase efficiency of the 17 off-docks for to eliminate sufferings to the both exporters and importers.
8. To engage foreign operating agencies for increasing capability of the port in container handling keeping pace with the fast moving world.
9. In order to overcome implementation problems and to enable the port to keep pace with the county's progress there is a need for regular discussions between the port authorities and the users, as well political leaders.
10. Inclusion of port users' representatives at the time of taking any decision regarding port.