

Mongla Port Authority: Journey Towards Excellence

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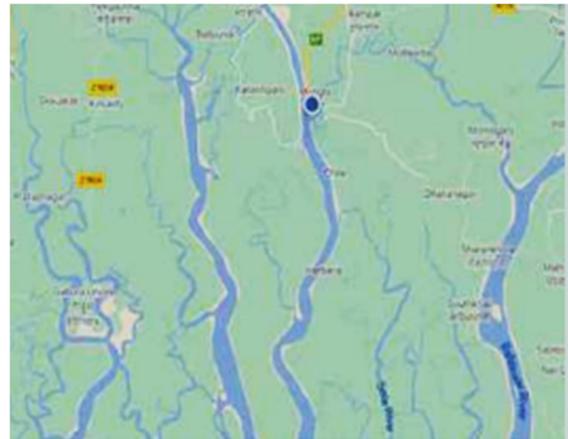
Bangladesh is a riverine country. Numerous rivers have increased her beauty in manifold. On the bank of one of such beautiful rivers, Chalna Port started its journey on 01 December 1950. A British merchant ship city of Leon set her footprint as a maiden ship of this port. Later, it was renamed Chalna Port Authority. The port was relocated to the bank of river Mongla in 1987 and renamed as Mongla Port Authority (MPA). MPA serves the southwest part as the second largest seaport of Bangladesh.

Commercial ships need to travel 131 km passage through UNESCO World Heritage Site the Sundarbans to use the port. Inland cargo vessels also traversed through the Sundarbans using river Sela for the movement of cargo to and from Mongla Port and Haldia port of West Bengal. As such, Mongla Port is obliged to preserve the sanctity of the Sundarbans, and it is very challenging.

Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was at the nation's helm for only about three and half years. He made an unprecedented master plan for the development of the nation in this short span of time. He led the Ministry of Shipping as the Head of the State, considering the importance of shipping and sea-based commerce.

Bangabandhu was not only concerned about sea-based commerce but also cautious about nature. He visualised the risks and challenges involved in plying cargo vessels through river Sela. Therefore, he directed to make an alternative inland water route by loop cutting dredging connecting Khulna and Mongla with the southern and eastern parts of the country. This alternative route started from Ghashiakhali of Morelganj Upzilla under Bagerhat district

and landed in river Mongla through Betbunia of Rampal Upazila. The new route shortened the journey and became popular in a very short time.



MPA suffered a setback in terms of the arrival of ships and overall operations since 2002. It faced difficulties even in paying salary and legal dues to the employees. After taking over charge of the government in 2009, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina made visionary plans and steered the country towards developments. MPA became an integral part of that visionary plan. She approved several multibillion-dollar megaprojects for MPA to make Bangabandhu's dream a reality.

A glimpse of megaprojects is enumerated in the subsequent paragraph:

Dredging. Navigability is the prime concern of MPA due to natural siltation. Previously, few dredging activities took place but on a smaller scale. Outer bar dredging was completed in 2020, allowing ships over 9 metres draught to enter the Pussur river channel. However, ships of said draught can arrive at Harbaria only, not up to the jetty. To address this impediment, the Inner bar dredging project has been initiated, targeting completion in 2022. Upon completion, ships over 9 metres of

draught will be able to dock at the jetty and facilitate more container carrying feeder vessels.

VTMIS. Vessel Traffic Management and Information System (VTMIS) has been initiated to comply ISPS Code under International Maritime Organisation. This project extends from MPA to Hiron Point, covering the entire length of the port channel. Simply, this is a digital and automated way of handling vessels in the port channel and recording data relevant to radio communication and navigation for further use. Live feed of vessels' passage in the port channel is also available for local and remote view. This project is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2021.



Construction of Container Jetty. Two container jetties are being constructed with gantry crane facilities under Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) project by Saif Port Ltd. They are scheduled to be completed by 2022. This project will enhance container handling capacity by four times. Another two container jetties are planned to be constructed under a soft-loan project by PRC. Necessary MOA and MOU have been signed in this regard. Two more jetties are also planned to be constructed under India's Line of Credit (LoC) programme.

Cargo/Container Handling Equipment. Seventy-five equipment are being procured to enhance cargo/container handling capacity. Sixty-four of these items have already reached, and the remaining eleven are scheduled to reach by the end of 2021.



Support Vessels. Six support vessels consisting of two tugboats (70-ton bollard pull), one hydrography & research vessel, one buoy laying vessel, one search & rescue vessel and one pilot mother vessel are being acquired to modernise the support vessels' fleet. Some of them will be available for use in 2022, while others in 2023.

Surface Water Treatment Plant. Drinking water has always been a significant concern in the Mongla area. Presently, freshwater from Foyla (22km away from MPA) is being brought by pipeline and served to visiting vessels, industrial plants and employees of the port. It has become more challenging with the ever-increasing demand and scarcity of existing sources. This plant is designed to provide 4,000 metric-ton drinking water per day and is expected to come into operation by the end of 2021.

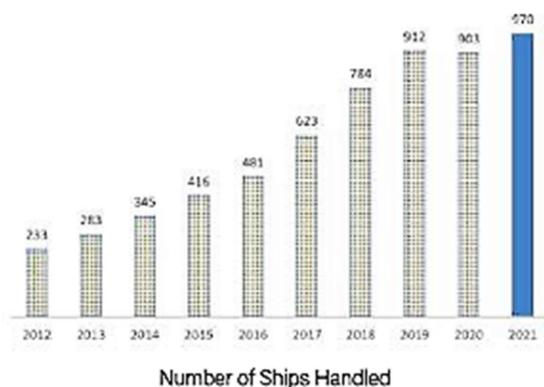
Modern Waste and Spilled Oil Management Project. It is a pioneer project in Bangladesh to comply with the MARPOL convention and preserve the Sundarbans' natural sanctity. This project aims to collect and treat solid and liquid waste from ships and vessels operating within the port limits and the Pussur River. This project can also augment national capacity to manage emergency oil spills under NOS COP.

Strategic Master Plan. The use of Mongla Port has become ever increasing since 2009. It has become challenging to meet this increasing

demand through a piece-meal plan/project. Hence, an effort has been underway with the assistance of reputed international consultants to address the demand with a visionary perspective. A strategic master plan will certainly guide MPA to expand its operation to meet short-term (2025), mid-term (2041) and long-term (2070) requirements.

Upgradation of Port. The use of Mongla Port is not limited to meeting domestic needs. Bhutan and Nepal being land-locked countries, have a dire need to use seaport facilities for bulk cargo transportation. As such, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal (BBIN) initiative has been launched to address this subregion's economic interdependence better. MPA, being the closest port for this subregion, need to upgrade its infrastructure. Few LoC programmes have been launched accordingly.

In fact, executing any megaproject takes time, and so far, none of the said megaprojects has been completed. However, a few small projects were undertaken as interim measures and to facilitate megaprojects. These interim measures have displayed a huge outcome in terms of turnover of ships, handling cargo and revenue income. As a result, MPA has made the highest record of success in 70 years.



Construction of the Padma bridge [expected to be open for public use in 2022] will certainly ease roadways and railways communication with capital, which will demand more cargo flow through MPA. To address this need, more ships will require to visit MPA. Hence, ship handling capacity needs to be increased through dredging, constructing jetties, and acquiring cargo handling equipment. More ships in port demand more support vessels, cargo/container yards, more risk of environmental pollution. In summary, more use of port means overall upgradation of port facilities.

All the projects mentioned above are targeted to be completed by the end of 2021 or in 2022. It indicates the synchronised effort from MPA, especially the present dynamic management team with pragmatic leadership and all-out support of the government, has made it possible for concerted efforts and guiding the projects towards successful completion in time.

The journey of MPA doesn't stop here. Projects like maintenance dredging, automation of services, ease of multimodal transportation of goods to and from MPA etc are in the pipeline to maintain its shinning performance. MPA is already one step ahead in becoming an eco-friendly port by implementing modern waste and spill oil management projects. It aims to be the first eco-friendly seaport in our country. MPA looks forward to serve as a subregional port by 2025.

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