News & Comment

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The Chittagong Port Deal:

Bangladesh's Economic Hope and Geopolitical Peril

News:

The Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) has signed a landmark concession agreement with APM Terminals BV — wholly owned by Maersk A/S of the AP Møller Foundation — to develop and operate the Laldia Container Terminal (LCT) under a long-term Public-Private Partnership (PPP) framework at a city hotel on Monday morning. The 30-year concession, with an extension linked to key performance indicators, marks one of the most significant foreign investments in Bangladesh’s port sector and is expected to elevate the country’s container-handling capacity and global trade competitiveness (Dhaka Tribune, November 17, 2025).

Comment:

The deal for APM Terminals to operate the Laldia Container Terminal at Chittagong Port presents a dual reality for Bangladesh. On one hand, it promises massive economic modernization, bringing global expertise to our vital trade gateway. This potential for increased efficiency and growth is welcome. However, our enthusiasm must be tempered with critical scrutiny. The economic benefits depend on transparency, which is starkly missing here. The public deserves to see the full contract - the tariff structures, traffic projections, and any sovereign guarantees - to ensure this is a commercially fair deal for Bangladesh, not just a profitable one for the operator. Furthermore, a modern terminal alone is not a silver bullet. It is a catalyst for national efficiency, not just a port project. Without fundamental reform, the terminal's promise will be choked by the chronic inefficiency and corruption in Bangladesh's roads, railways, and customs.

Ultimately, this deal transcends economics, embroiling Bangladesh in a perilous geopolitical struggle. The Bay of Bengal is a strategic nexus, and Chittagong’s location near the vital Malacca Strait makes it a prize for major powers. And, unfortunately, Bangladesh is becoming a pawn in a struggle between a US-led order and a China-led alternative, a competition we are ill-equipped to navigate. The EU is asserting its role in the strategic Bay of Bengal through its ‘Global Gateway’ initiative, which serves as a transparent alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and deepens European influence in the Indo-Pacific. Driven notably by France, which advocates for an independent EU strategic capacity, and this approach creates a dynamic of both alignment and autonomy with the US. By investing in key infrastructure, such as the APM terminal in Chittagong, the EU gains a strategic foothold, counters Chinese influence, and strengthens partnerships with regional powers like India, thereby aligning the interests of the US, UK, and India.

The tragic reality is that Bangladesh lacks the competent, sovereign-minded state-level leadership required to navigate such treacherous geopolitical waters. While the people of Bangladesh aspire for global connectivity, economic progress, and modernization, achieving these goals cannot come at the cost of Ummah’s sovereignty, which is endangered by becoming a pawn in the superpower struggle. The fundamental issue is that the leadership in Bangladesh, like that in many other Muslim lands, was born from the womb of the colonial West; this legacy of subservience continues to dominate our political DNA, producing rulers who act as lackeys and remain submissive to Western interests. Therefore, only a fundamental change in leadership - one that restores courageous governance under the rightly-guided Caliphate (Khilafah Rashidah) - can prevent Bangladesh from remaining a perpetual pawn in the geopolitical games of external powers and enable it to become an independent player on the world stage.

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