

## *Foreword from Chairman's Desk*

Celebration of birthdays, particularly for organisations that are more than hundred years old, often tend to turn into an event of fondly basking in the glory of yesteryears' achievements - an indulgent way of looking back at the haloed memories of the past. For Kolkata Port, turning 136 years today, the story, however, is a bit different with the organisation showing all the exuberance and dynamism of forging ahead, unmatched by the relatively newer entrants in the maritime sector and is ready to make its tryst with the future.

From a cumulative annual traffic that had virtually stagnated in the range of 30 million tonnes in 2001-02, the port has clocked a record level of 53.14 million tonnes in 2005-06, thus registering the highest growth in traffic, both in absolute and percentage terms, among all the Indian Major ports in the last four years. Interestingly, 2005-06 is also the second successive year when the port, in terms of the volume of its annual traffic handled, has been able to retain its second position among Indian Major Ports while achieving a growth of 15% over the last year, which was much higher than the national average of 10.4%. It is a matter of pride that Kolkata Port is the only port after Visakhapatnam, among all Major Ports of the country, to have exceeded the 50 million tonnes mark in 2005-2006.

Though conventionally this particular performance parameter of 'annual traffic throughput' is one of the most standardised ones

employed by the port industry in judging the relative standing of a port, one would appreciate that this does not, in a way, do justice in assessing the potential of Kolkata Port, which is the only riverine major port of the country. Being a riverine port within a tidal estuary, it has its own strength and weaknesses. Hence, judged through a comprehensive evaluation of these parameters, Kolkata Port's achievements are all the more laudable.

While, taking lessons from the history of the port's gradual southward shift, we continue exploring Saugar and even locales beyond it, further down the sea, as deep drafted anchorages to attract ships of higher drafts and dimensions, to capture, some of the virtues of, shall we say, a sea port; we have, in recent times, also been seriously harnessing the port's sui-generis characteristic: its unique riverine systems. With a long 232 km navigational channel (incidentally, greater than the sum of navigational channel lengths of all the major ports put together) and having a strategic connectivity to both National Waterway No.1 (Ganga) and National Waterway No.2 (Brahmaputra) and enjoying a close proximity to Bangladesh through the riverine route, the port of Kolkata is ideally positioned to emerge as a major Inland Water Transport hub in the country. Indeed, these are the areas of strength we have to increasingly synergise to ensure prosperity of the port in the years ahead.

Always nurturing a warm and vibrant bond with the city of Kolkata which nestles it and on many accounts owes its origin, the port has been caressing the city in the recent years by gifting the first Maritime Centre, housed in the Science City Campus,

refurbishment of some of the historic ghats of great heritage value, dotting the banks of the river including the recently renovated 'Mayer Ghat' at Baghbazar, state-of-the-art upkeep of the our very own Rabindra Setu (Howrah Bridge) with which we share a close identity. In fact, we would like to take it to the illustrious league of the great bridges around the world through decorative illumination of its facade which is expected to be inaugurated shortly.

Recently, we have embarked on an ambitious project of developing a Central Record & Documentation Centre, the first 'maritime archive' of the country, making an effort to retrieve, archive, digitise and eventually make accessible to the public, the vast and varied repertoire of materials, drawings, rare maps and photographs, historical footages and resolutions related to the formal genesis and evolution of the port in its present incarnation, that were disparately strewn across various sources, including our very own. These include unearthing the river maps of the meandering Hooghly, the fascinating saga of the transfer of Bengal Pilots' Services under the administrative reins of the Port, the incidence of frequent ship wreckages, the maiden designs of the Howrah Bridge etc. This may become a veritable treasure trove of materials for research and reference for serious scholars and professionals as well as for the uninitiated ones, imbibing them with a feel of the port history, inextricably enmeshed as it is with the evolution of the city, and sensitising them with the need for its proper preservation.

This is the third successive year since we have started organizing annual lectures in commemoration of the birth anniversary celebration of our port. For the last few years, we have been endeavouring to put across the thought processes of some of our society's fertile minds – hearing them to 'think aloud', not necessarily limiting themselves to the business of port.

We have always held that the occasion commemorating the Port's anniversary, is somewhat unique in two senses. On one end of the spectrum, it gives us an opportunity to unfold ourselves to the public at large, showcasing our achievements and recounting the challenges that need to be overcome in the process while, at the other end, we allow us to be seen, understood and even surmised by professionals belonging to different genres of intellectual accomplishment – ranging from celebrated historians, economists, to the scientists and philosophers of extraordinary calibre and repute. This conduit, I hope, does help in more ways than one, in looking at ourselves from a dispassionate distance, learn from some of our past mistakes or perhaps more importantly, sieve off the wrongful notions, or even the mind blocks that have imperceptively seeped into our collective consciousness, taking us as virtual hostages in the warp of time; and allow us to take certain 'out of the box' decisions with some course corrections coming in the way.

This year, we are extremely grateful to find amongst us Prof Ashesh Prosad Mitra, FRS & Honorary Scientist of Eminence & Formerly Director General, CSIR and Secretary to the Govt. of

India, Department of Scientific & Industrial Research, who by his sheer immensity of scholarship and erudition, has been a leading thinker - a visionary of our times. He had been gracious enough to deliver the 136<sup>th</sup> KoPT Anniversary Address entitled “The Changing World and Implications for Bengal”.

The choice of his topic is extremely appropriate in the present context as the port industry, if one takes it as a representative coordinate of the transmutation that the larger leitmotif of the entire edifice of India’s socio-economic and commercial institution is currently passing through, thanks to the fierce equilibrating forces that have been unleashed by the process of liberalisation and globalisation, has to face the challenges and build a market-centric service hub, providing matching logistics and infrastructure, in an environmentally sustainable way, while offering a competitive tariff structure, trying to make this changeover as seamless as possible.

We are also grateful to Prof Sukanta Chaudhuri, Professor of English and Director, School of Cultural Texts and Records, Jadavpur University, who has kindly consented to deliver the keynote address. His address captioned ‘The Port, the City and the World’ which we eagerly look forward to listen to, is significant as a study of the dynamics of adjustments of the port and the metropolis in a changing world.

Kolkata Port looks forward to drawing lessons from their learned discourses as it attempts to re-define and re-orient its priorities in the changed perspectives and carve out a definitive niche in the maritime map of the world. Historically, commencing its journey

from Tamralipti in the first Century AC and shifting its base southwards to Saptgram in the early 14<sup>th</sup> Century, to Hooghly in the late sixteenth century and further to Kolkata in the late seventeenth Century, the port has translocated from time to time to meet myriad challenges. History has, therefore, shown that Kolkata Port is not averse to making pro-active changes as may be required in terms of the imperatives of changing times. This amenability to change is perhaps the greatest underlying strength of Kolkata Port, which has always been rewarded by rich dividends. The future charter of the port also envisages a journey southwards to reap the potential of the deep drafted locations within the port and beyond. The journey is exciting but complex. To meet the challenges of the changing times, it may be worthwhile to remember the following wise words of wit:

*"We would rather be ruined than change  
We would rather die in our dread  
Than climb the cross of the moment  
And let our illusions die".*

The need of the hour, therefore, is that we must, as always in the past, we must evince the spirit of willingness to change as per the dictates of time. This alone can stand the port in good stead heralding its glorious future to scale rare heights in the years ahead.

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Kolkata  
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Dr A.K. Chanda  
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