

## *Foreword from Chairman's Desk*

Almost like a meandering river, taking twists and turns along narrow ravines, flowing at times subterranean across the barren bowels of the earth, only to gush forth in rapturous torrents to the mighty seas beyond – the journey traversed by our port, as it celebrates today its 135<sup>th</sup> birthday, has also been a fascinating one. It commenced with Tamralipta, dotting the site of modern Tamluk in the district of Midnapore in the first century A.C. and then gradually shifted its base to Adi Saptagram in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century and Hooghly and then finally to Kolkata. Unlike a sea port which largely has a geographically fixed locale with a primarily port-centric spread of its geographical hinterland, that of a riverine system like Kolkata Port, even for the sake of its sheer survival and growth, has to be very complex and dynamic in its evolution. Allegorically, it has to travel with its changing wares, trying to tie along with its patrons, making whatever alterations, location or service wise, that are needed to cater to their fancies.

From the position of frontrunner among all Major Ports of India in the mid fifties and even in the early sixties, in terms of the volume of annual traffic handled, Kolkata Port gradually slipped down a sliding trajectory vis-à-vis other competing sea ports of India. In fact, the port was, at one time, virtually written off by the doomsayers as a

“port with a glorious past”. Through all these troubled times, the port, however, continued to make all out efforts to remain astern, gravitating seawards to harness its deep drafted facilities, down at Haldia in 1977. And now, Kolkata Port is looking beyond the estuary, further southwards at Saugar and Sandheads, in its readiness to cater to ships with ever increasing dimensions.

It has been particularly redeeming for Kolkata port as it turned the tide to rediscover and redefine itself in the last few years. From a cumulative annual traffic which had practically plateaued in the range of about 30 million tonnes, the port has clocked a record level of 46.16 million tonnes of traffic in 2004-05, registering a phenomenal growth of 52%, over the traffic it handled in 2001-02, i.e. within a span of just about three years. Thus, after a gap of long thirty seven years, Kolkata Port, once again, ranked second among all major ports of India in 2004-05, in terms of the volume of total traffic handled, with its share in the all India major ports’ traffic pie, also registering a rise; and most importantly, the trend continues in the current fiscal too, with the port recording highest growth, both in absolute and percentage terms, vis-à-vis other major ports of India.

While, with the firm determination to harness its deep draft advantage available at Saugar & Sandheads, we, at Kolkata port, have been making continuous endeavour for a steady southward march to make inroads into the sea; we are also aware of the tremendous potential of our port, the only riverine major port in India, for development of inland water transport. With its

connectivity to two National Waterways viz. NW1 (Ganga) and NW2 (Brahmaputra) and with its proximity to Bangladesh through riverine route, Kolkata Port is ideally positioned to emerge as a major Inland Water Transport hub in the country and a package of measures are already afoot to realize this objective.

Like any individual, an organisation also right from its fledgling state of growth, burgeons and evolves into full maturity, drawing strength and sustenance from its immediate and not so immediate neighbourhood; and depending on the essence of these inputs which seep into the very vitals of its body processes, it either matures into a vibrant institution, serving as a beacon light for others or eventually decays and dies to extinction. The process of churning a new and expansive trading hub, on a port-centric customer base with matching logistics and competitive facilities/tariff structure, is one of the defining challenges the port faces in the years ahead as it catapults itself into the new millennium. That Kolkata Port Trust, despite the myriad trial and tribulations, has been able, not only to sustain itself but to expand its network into manifold ventures, regaining its foothold in the maritime map of the country, speaks volumes of its resilience and spirit to live up to the challenges of time and technology.

Since last year, we have been organising anniversary lectures in commemoration of the port's birth anniversary, in an effort to institutionalise and perhaps document the process and dialectics of this change and steady 'growing up' of the organisation – an exercise

of self introspection and discovery of sorts, from an altogether different paradigm. We have already published an anthology, compiling the Anniversary lectures delivered last year by Dr. Sankar Sen, formerly, Vice Chancellor, Jadavpur University and Minister-in-Charge, Power, Science, Technology & Non-Conventional Energy Sources, Government of West Bengal captioned 'Healthy Oceans' ; and by Prof. Satyesh Chakraborty, noted educationist and former Professor, IIM , entitled 'The Story of a River Port'.

This year too, we are proud to have amongst us Prof. (Dr.) Barun De, Founder Director of Centre for Studies in Social Sciences & Former Professor of Social and Economic History, Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta to deliver the KoPT Anniversary lecture, entitled " The History of the Kolkata Port and the Hooghly River and its Future" ; and Dr. Ashok Mitra, Former Minister of Finance, Development and Planning, Govt. of West Bengal, to deliver the key-note address.

In our Indian tradition of epistemology, discussions and debates, as reflected in numerous polemical treatises, have been the very cornerstone in advancement and enrichment of knowledge. Incidentally, one is inevitably reminded of the innate argumentative spirit of us, Indians, as so eloquently espoused by Dr Amartya Sen in his recent book, 'The Argumentative Indian' which has been the principal change -agent of the ideas and ideals of our society, a

graduation of sorts, from confusion to reason and rationality. I am sure that the learned discourses of these savants would enlighten us, helping us glean some unerring lessons for the future.

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Kolkata

October 17, 2005

Dr. A. K. Chanda

Chairman

Kolkata Port Trust