

## Foreword

We are at the threshold of celebrating the 138<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the formal , institutional existence of our Kolkata port and let me take with you the opportunity of wishing a ‘very happy birthday’ to our ever ‘young’ and dynamic port.

The Port Commissioners, as we are all aware, formally commenced its journey from 17<sup>th</sup> October, 1870 – the very mile-post we are presently commemorating, by dint of the historic Act V of 1870, though the port and shipping activities at Calcutta had commenced as early as in 1690, even predating the setting up of the Marine establishment of the East India Company in 1758.

The saga of evolution of the Kolkata Port has within its broad appendage, a rich mosaic of events and activities, the sheer diversity of which defies any attempt of straight jacketed and linear accountal : rather being a simple chronological narrative, it is a story of a series of experiments, multi-layered growth, uniform and again staccato, of diversification, of retrogression, of dreams turning sour only to be redeemed from unexpected quarters, to always help carry the torch forward.....

From a cumulative annual traffic that had virtually plateaued in the range of 30 million tonnes in 2001-02, Kolkata Port has, in the meanwhile, taken a slew of measures to tone up its service profile aimed at realizing better customer satisfaction, to clock a record level of 57.329 million tonnes in 2007-08, thus registering the third highest growth in traffic among all the Indian Major ports in the last five years. Interestingly, for the last three successive years, since 2004-05, the port, in terms of the annual volume of traffic handled, has been able to retain its second position among Indian Major Ports.

During 2007-08, the Port, however, marginally slipped to the third rank and yes, I am aware, coupled with a slump in the industrial growth throughout India during the last few months, there have been some disquieting developments in our port environment too, in terms of dwindling drafts and consequential fall in the rate of growth of traffic, but, let me assure you, we have already undertaken a package of measures to turn the tide and make the port float astern in full-vigoured steam.

In recent years, in tune with the necessity of a huge capacity build-up in our port sector, Kolkata Port has embarked upon an ambitious modernisation drive, making investments in construction/mechanization of berths/jetties/ river-regulatory works, procurement of flotilla, induction of state-of-the-art-equipment etc and offering matching logistics, to make it user-friendly and the most cherished destination of our customers.

It is interesting to note that Kolkata Dock System (one of whose docks had to be closed in 2001, just prior to my joining at Kolkata Port) handled an all time record traffic of 13.741 mt in 2007-08, registering a growth of 9.09% compared to the last fiscal. Though, in essence it turns out to be a cold statistical fact, it, however, gives all of us a sense of enormous collective pride to recall that in 2006-07 itself, KDS surpassed its previous highest record of handling 11.063 mt attained in 1964-65 (before the commissioning of HDC).

It is perhaps a pleasant co-incidence that this year we would be completing 80 years of opening of our erstwhile 'King George's Dock'. The formal opening of the dock was performed by then Viceroy, Lord Irwin on December 29, 1928 with Charles Stuart Williams as the Chairman of the Port Trust. It was later re-christened as 'Netaji Subhas Dock' in 1972.

It is for the fifth year in succession that, in celebration of our port's birthday, we have been organising commemorial lectures, where some of our society's most prolific minds congregate and engage themselves in informed discourses over topics having far-reaching imports - from sciences, environment, history, society, economics, et al, giving us the much needed intellectual drive to stay tuned to our times. This unique way of looking at ourselves from a close, impersonal distance, is, our annual tryst with time-the-mirror, almost like a rarefied filter, as it were, where, in the light of past experiences and contemporary developments, we rediscover ourselves only to adopt time-tested strategies for the future.

This year, we are extremely happy to have in our midst, Justice (Retd) Ruma Pal, former judge of the Supreme Court of India, who served on the bench, from January 2000 to June 2006, had championed the causes of human and women rights and reforms, apart from addressing the constitutional, labour related issues in various international foras including, International Forum of Women Judges, International Academy of Law, Committee of Experts of the International Labor Organization etc. She has accorded her kind consent to deliver the 138<sup>th</sup> KoPT Anniversary Address, entitled, "Secularism and Law".

The importance of the subject, though well-enshrined in our Constitution as one of the key institutional pillars of a vibrant and functioning democracy, has often been, diabolically or otherwise, grossly misconstrued, irrespective of political and ideological divides, endangering the delicate fabric of our multi-layered societal leitmotif and this is time that the ideal was once again brought to the public fore and its importance underlined to the greater awareness and understanding of the governing issues at stake. We would be awaiting with much interest and excitement to share the vision that the country's one of the foremost legal luminaries has in this regard.

Professor Jayantanuja Bandyopadhyaya, Professor Emeritus of International Relations, Jadavpur University, and a globally acclaimed authority on Political Science and International Relations, has kindly agreed to deliver the key note address, entitled, “Towards a World Government”

The choice of his topic is also profound in the current liberalized political regime of globalization and laissez-faire, where though the institutional rigidities in terms of tariff barriers, market imperfections, inflexibility of labour laws, inconvertibility of global currencies (in current/capital account) etc. are gradually giving way to a more seamless transfer of capital, labour and financial- in short, ‘knowledge’, products across the borders at optimized transaction costs, (with the accompanying hazards of the global contagion effect of ‘bad economics’ also, spreading thick and fast across hitherto insulated economies making them extremely vulnerable, as is recently manifest now in terms of a global recession); there has not been much uniformity or even a broad degree of agreement in the ideation of common principles /procedures towards the evolution of a more humane, responsible, democratic and a just system of governance which, irrespective of individual political allegiances, would aim at achieving the universal goals of sustainable development, based on an equitable sharing of global resources with least adverse social /economic/ecological spin-offs, while assuring the dignity and innovativeness of human capital.

We hope the learned discourses of the savants would provide the much-needed intellectual platform from where further ideas may germinate in future.

Kolkata  
October 17, 2008

Dr. A.K. Chanda  
Chairman  
Kolkata Port Trust

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