INTERVIEW

Our goal is to make Indian ports more competitive globally

Indian Ports Association (IPA), which acts as a Think Tank for the Ministry of Shipping, is a driving force fostering the spirit of growth for regular improvement of the 12 major ports in India, thus contributing to the growth of the economy and the country at large. Dr Abhijit Singh, Executive Director, IPA in an exclusive interaction with Ritika Arora Bhola talks about the contribution of India's major ports in the Ease of Doing Business Ranking in the country, role of technology, and government policies to boost cargo volumes and capacity at the ports. Edited Excerpts:

Elaborate on the cargo volumes handled by the major Indian ports in India and the steps to augment the same in coming years.

The total traffic handled at major ports from April to November, 2019 was 463.07 million tonnes (MT) as against 461.49 MT handled during the corresponding period of the previous year. The overall growth of the traffic handled was 0.34 per cent. Seven Ports viz. Kolkata (incl. Haldia), Paradip, Visakhapatnam, V O Chidambaranar, Cochin, Mumbai and Deendayal registered positive growth in traffic. Whereas traffic declined in five Ports viz. Kamarajar, Chennai, New Mangalore, Mormugao and JNPT as compared to the corresponding period of last year.

The highest growth was registered by Visakhapatnam Port (9.37 per cent) followed by Deendayal (6.30 per cent), V O Chidambarnar Port (4.85 per cent), Cochin (4.41 per cent) and Paradip (2.74 per cent). Mormugao Port registered the highest decline in traffic (-15.09 per cent), followed by New Mangalore by (-14.41per cent), Chennai (-9.53 per cent), Kamarajar (-8.47per cent) and JNPT (-3.16 per cent).

Performance review of the major ports in the country in the light of their traffic handling capacity is a continuous process. The port authorities are requested to explore the possibility of generating new cargoes, so that the gap between the traffic and capacity may be reduced. User ministries and departments like Fertilizers, Petroleum, Coal, Power, Food and Civil Supplies, etc. are also being interacted from time to time for assigning their cargo to major ports. Similarly, major ports also organise trade meets to attract traffic from their hinterland/region.

As a part of the National Perspective Plan (NPP), a roadmap is developed for increasing the Indian port capacity to 3300+ MTPA by 2025. Kindly inform about the progress going on in this regard to achieve the desired goal?

There has been a strong focus on infrastructure development and capacity enhancement of ports over the years to meet the growing trade requirements of the country. Ultimate goal is to make Indian ports more competitive globally. During the last 10 years, there has been capacity addition of 1323.31 MTPA in Indian ports. The cargo handling capacity of all Indian ports has increased from 992.83 million tonne per annum (MTPA) in 2009-10 to 2316.14 MTPA in

2018-19. Out of this, capacity available at major ports as on 31-03-2019 was 1452.64 MTPA and non-major ports, it was 863.50 MTPA.

Well-built port infrastructure requirements, such as quay, terminals, berths, piers, breakwater infrastructure, size of depth and basin, and storage unit capacity, all-weather technologies, advanced machines, navigational instruments, cranes and accident and disaster proof infrastructure has an influence on the level of competitiveness of a port. Hinterland connectivity and location of ports also plays a crucial role in determining the competitiveness. Besides, the volume of cargo handled by ports reflects their ability to attract business. In line with this, for improving the efficiency and productivity of India's major ports, 116 initiatives have been identified, which will unlock 100 MTPA of capacity at these ports. 95 initiatives have already been completed unlocking more than 80 MTPA capacity. Further, there has been number of capacity expansion projects identified under Sagarmala Programme, which will help in achieving the desired goal by 2025. Two new major Greenfield ports are proposed to be developed at Vadhavan (Maharashtra) and Paradip Outer Harbour (Odhisha) which will also help in increasing the capacity at ports to handle India's EXIM traffic.

Tell us about the contribution of major ports in the Ease of Doing Business Ranking in India in the last few years.

Number of measures like modernisation, mechanisation, process improvement, policy intervention and digital transformation process has been implemented to reduce time and cost in EXIM trade and improve Ease of Doing Business. Some of those are mentioned as below:

- A centralised web-based Port Community System (PCS) has been operationalised across all major ports which enables seamless data flow between various stakeholders through a common interface.
- To move towards complete paperless regime, Electronic Delivery Order (e-DO) through PCS is made mandatory along with e-invoicing and e-payment.
- An Enterprise Business System (EBS) is being implemented at 5 Major Ports- Mumbai, Chennai, Deendayal, Paradip, Kolkata (including Haldia) Port with project cost of approx 320 cr to provide a digital port ecosystem that will adopt leading international practices without losing its alignment to existing local needs.
- Implementation of Logistics Data Bank Service under Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor Development Corporation (DMICDC) for enabling track and trace movement of EXIM container at major ports.
- To ease process, the accommodation for laboratories to Participating Government Agencies (PGAs) has been provided at the major ports.
- New Container Terminal Data Centre equipped with the state-of-the-art technical infrastructure for seamless integration of technology into port operations for seamless cargo evacuation and cargo evacuation launched at JNPT.
- Gateway Terminals India (GTI) at JNPT has deployed 14 new Rubber Tyred Gantry Cranes (RTGCs) that has increased productivity of stacking containers, thereby easing the congestion at the ports, reducing overall time to handle the shipment at ports.
- To ensure faster cargo evacuation, JNPT has set up a Customs Processing Zones, Centralised Parking Plaza, besides undertaking widening of port highways, developing a Common Rail Yard.
- New drive-through Container Scanner installed at JNCH having 9-10 times faster through-put.
- JNPT completed dredging for deepening and widening of Main Harbour Channel on February, 2019 (from 14 mtr to 15 mtr, 13 km length, costed 2029.17 cr) to handle 12,500 TEUs capacity vessels from earlier restricted to 8000 TEUs.
- JNPT has initiated augmentation of Rail and Road connectivity programs in which nearly 33 kms of existing NH 4B and SH58 roads are being upgraded from 4 lanes to 6/8 lanes with separate service lanes at investment of `3000 cr.
- Major ports specially JNPT has introduced a Mobile App to give updates related to traffic, tracking of containers, vessel position, berthing – un-berthing of vessels.

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Technology has literally revolutionised the Indian maritime industry. Please tell us about the advanced Digital Technology being used at Ports for smooth and efficient operations?

Some of the measures taken up which are catalyst to improving operational efficiencies are installation of container scanners and RFID system, automatic berth allocation, plot/yard planning, linking of rail booking with port systems, etc. While IT and automation is playing a major role in controlling and monitoring multiple port operations.

Mundra port has introduced digital navigation for internal container movement, Auto-Position Detection System, real time liquid tanks visibility, online container documentation, RFID-based fuel management system, Work-Force Management System, and e-Clearances for dry and liquid cargos from Customs. Krishnapatnam Port has installed an automatic fertiliser handling system which has reduced the time taken for the process to a mere six to eight hours from 2-3 days.

Further, ports are also focusing on adopting few emerging maritime technologies, such as:

- Dynamic Under Keel Clearance
- Moor Master
- Tracking Crane Operations using Sensor Technology
- Tools such as Vessel Arrival Prediction, Vehicle Booking systems, Hinterland Truck Marketplace, etc. that can significantly help with streamlining port operations, increasing transparency
- Advanced and under development technologies such as Hyperloop, 3D printing of spare parts for vessel repair
- Best in Class Port Operating Systems. CC