



SHIPPINGNetwork

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Pull together

The power of the people



Labour convention laid bare | Celebrating the 'super human' | Testing the psyche | A happy Union

CHENNAI

Chennai made the headlines for the wrong reasons at the end of October, as Cyclone Nilam approached the Indian coastline. The port was closed and the city braced itself.

One seafarer was killed and five missing after a large oil tanker beached off the coast in the storm. However, overall there was far less damage to the port and city than many feared, as the cyclone made landfall about 60 km south.

Chennai, on India's southeast coast, is expanding rapidly as a maritime hub and as India's second largest container port. Both PSA and DP World operate container terminals at the port; PSA says Chennai is serving an ever-growing hinterland and catering to the fast-growing automotive, pharmaceuticals, textiles, leather, light engineering and chemical manufacturing sectors, while the region is steadily emerging as the hub for the Indian east coast.

Sanjam Sahi Gupta, founder and president of the newly formed WISTA India (Women's International Shipping & Trading Association), says that Chennai port, due to its strategic location, has been transformed into a mainline port, with direct connectivity to 50-plus ports. "While the breakbulk cargo is routed through Vizag, Chennai port, due to its efficient services at viable cost and user-friendly approach, has become a hub port for containers, cars and project cargo on the east coast of India."

At 125 years, Chennai is the third oldest port among the 12 major ports of India, says Ms Gupta. "The economic growth of Tamil Nadu has been attributed substantially to Chennai port."

The new WISTA branch has been formed in Mumbai, where Ms Gupta joined her family firm, Sitara Shipping Ltd, in 2001 – she currently heads up the NVOCC division of the business.

GIRL POWER

It was her interest in WISTA going back nearly ten years that led to the formation of the India association. At the time of writing, a handful of women in Chennai had expressed an early interest in joining WISTA India, and Ms Gupta was planning a trip to the city to meet them.



"Chennai port, due to its efficient services at viable cost and user-friendly approach, has become a hub port for containers, cars and project cargo on the east coast of India," Sanjam Sahi Gupta, WISTA India

"In my last 11 years in the industry, I have found few women in top management in most companies," she says. "Women are present in great numbers in the lower level – such as customer service/documentation executives. Women, though very competent, have to work harder to make their mark. They face different challenges – but lack any support system."

She adds: "Whenever I attend an event for any association, there are never more than a handful of women. And very often, as our members have shared their experiences, they are presumed to be secretaries of their colleagues/subordinates!"

Mindsets need to be changed and women need to be adequately represented in the industry, says Ms Gupta.

"Our aim is to provide a platform for the women to meet and share views and experiences, and mentor the younger ones. We shall be hosting seminars, talks and training programmes; for this, we have got the support of Narottaam Morarjee Institute of Shipping, which is a government-approved institute."

Meanwhile, GAC India's Chennai office provides ship agency, freight services such as customs clearance for imports and exports of air and sea cargoes, and also international moving services. As well as serving Chennai, it also handles maritime operations at the neighbouring ports of Ennore, Kattupalli and Karaikal. This September, GAC Chennai was appointed liner agent for Sarjak Container Lines, an Indian-based NVOCC specialising in moving over-dimensional cargoes on heavy duty flat rack equipment.

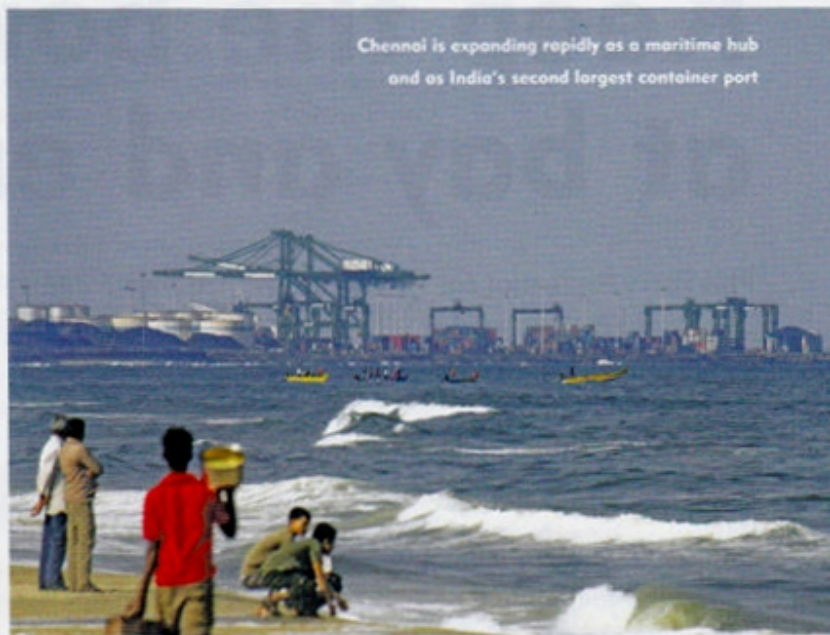
"In line with growth nationwide, there has been a great deal of infrastructural development in Chennai over the past decade," says Sathya Chandrashekar, general manager, shipping operations, of GAC Shipping (India).

This has included the opening of a new container port early this year, 25 km north of the existing port, developed to handle increasing container traffic. This new port also has a shipyard for building new vessels.

BOTTLENECK

However, there are downsides to Chennai's success. The location of the main port, in the middle of the city, has created bottlenecks for the movement of cargo both incoming and outgoing, says Capt Chandrashekar.

"Due to poor accessibility, congestion at the container terminals has become a common problem in recent years – and when that happens, a congestion surcharge is levied by container carriers. This has an overall negative impact on the port and its users. Measures such as the construction of feeder roads, for better access to ports and terminals, are under way to remove these bottlenecks – albeit at a relatively slow pace."



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Capt Chandrashekar says major areas of business opportunity for GAC Chennai include the oil and gas sector, as well as containers. "Further, with the development of the ports of Karaikal and Ennore, we are seeing increased opportunities to handle more vessels. Ennore presently handles tankers, as well as car carrier/ro-ro cargoes, while Karaikal focuses on bulk cargoes – mainly coal – in large quantities, mainly catering for larger vessels."

The Indian government has recognised the need for ports with better infrastructure for mechanical handling and deeper draughts to accommodate new generation ships, and is encouraging private entrepreneurs to invest in and help develop these ports, says Capt Chandrashekar. A growing number of new ports are being developed in India – both container terminals and LPG/LNG terminals, much of this being driven by the private sector, with support from the government.

"However, the process of awarding the projects is sometimes slow, especially when it involves private companies partnered with established international container terminal operators and, as a result, there are some delays in the development of new terminals."

And, he says, while there is an increase in private sector investment in ports and port-related infrastructure, the road infrastructure still presents a major problem, limiting the hinterland for each port for the movement of cargoes. "Major highway construction programmes have been put in place, and the situation is slowly improving. However, bottlenecks are still very common at port entrances, container receiving yards and ICDs." **SN**

Global operators enjoy Chennai success

PSA's Chennai International Terminals, which began operations three years ago, has three container berths with a total quay length of 832 metres and depth of 15.5 metres, and designed capacity of 1.5m teu. A key factor is its rail links to inland container depot destinations, with its own dedicated rail connection right into the terminal. This year, PSA took delivery of four new ship-to-shore quay cranes and eight new RTGs at Chennai.

DP World Chennai has four berths with depth alongside of 13.4 metres. Its terminal area of 21.4 hectares includes a container freight

station for inspections, LCL (less than container load) destuffing and delivery of import cargo – DPW says this facility enables swift transshipment of LCL cargo to ICDs at locations such as Bangalore, Hyderabad, Cochin and Pondicherry.

DPW took over the Chennai terminal in 2001, when it was privatised. Earlier this year, the shipping journal EXIM India presented DP World Chennai with the award for the best container terminal operator in South and East India, for the fourth year running. **SN**