

“BACK TO BUSINESS AS USUAL”

Sanjay Sethi, IAS, Chairman, Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT) speaks to BW Businessworld's **Urvi Shrivastav** on the functioning of ports in India, JNPT's new initiatives, and its sustainable business practices in the next normal. Excerpts:

Given the disruptions in the supply chain last year, how are things shaping up for JNPT now?

Last year was in fact very challenging due to the pandemic. There were disruptions at JNPT as well due to supply chain disruptions and demand contractions. The first quarter of the last financial year, hence, was particularly bad. However, things picked up after October. This year is more likely business as usual. JNPT is functioning like any other port in terms of traffic already.

Digitisation picked up for all last year. What are some of the measures taken by JNPT in its digital transition?

One of the key reasons for disruption was manufacturing not happening at the fullest capacity. Transportation from the hinterland to the port was affected in a big way. The drivers who manned tractors and other vehicles in the port were not welcomed back by the gram panchayats. We got people from other states to fill the gap and made arrangements for them to stay, including food. This was so for 4-5 months that were very challenging. For our personnel, we made sure the chain is not disrupted at the port level. We made sure we had a new standard operating procedure for our working where people felt comfortable. Regular sanitisation activities were undertaken and strict Covid protocols were followed. We had new seating arrangements for meetings, how we could get in touch with the state authorities, and all the other stakeholders. All these measures were undertaken to ensure the smooth functioning of JNPT.

When it comes to logistics, what are the measures JNPT is undertaking right now?

In terms of capacity, we have the fourth container terminal which got completed in its first phase in 2013. In phase two, environmental clearance is awaited, which will start when we achieve a capacity of 10 million Twenty-

Foot Equivalent Units or TEUs. We have been doing five million TEUs for the last three years, but we want our capacities to double. Also, the responsibility of setting up the largest port in the country, or the Wadhawan port, has been given to JNPT, which was approved by the Union Cabinet last February. We are also working on rail connectivity measures, as well as detailed engineering, including changes in the layout and the kind of model that will help the potential concessionaires, and the financial engineering part. This is an ambitious project that looks at a capacity of 24 million TEUs, which will put it among the top 10 ports of the world as per current rankings.

What are the measures taken by JNPT to ensure the sustainability of the port and sustainable business practices?

We consider sustainability the key pillar on which the port functions. A ma-

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major part of sustainability is energy transition, for which we use solar energy, which fuels 30 per cent of our energy needs. This will be as high as 40 per cent in the next two years, and 60 per cent by 2030, the stipulated target. In addition, we are working on a pilot project on floating solar infrastructure in seawater, and using EV vehicles in our port area. We are also using gantry cranes at the port, where the estimated carbon footprint



saved every year is 3,500 tonnes. We are also conducting a pilot project using 20,000 litres of biodiesel for our internal movements. We have replaced our 600hp diesel engines with 450hp diesel vehicles.

We have set targets for increasing the green cover at the port; we already have a huge mangroves plantation. Safety is a big component of sustainability, and we have taken adequate safety measures adding to the sustainability quotient. The three pillars of environment, social, and government combine to make sustainability as we understand it. We also look at public-private partnerships, which will help increase operational efficiency and, in turn, financial efficiency. There is also a Skill Development Centre, which we started in collaboration with al Cargo.

What are some of the practices that smaller ports can adopt?

Among non-major ports, out of 200, only about 100 are active. It is noteworthy that if a port is not competitive, it cannot be sus-

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tainable. Sharing information and getting a lot of it online is the real way to cut cost and time, which, in turn, helps the port to become cost-competitive.

What is the future of maritime space once Covid is a thing of the past?

The vessel size is increasing when we talk about global economic uncertainty. However, in the ports sector, the existing reports show some optimism, where 9.1 per cent growth is sought. However, we are also dealing with issues of empty containers, and ocean freight rates rising. For a country like India, containerisation is going to go up, and the rising freight rates imply the same. Our share in the overall trade is definitely going to increase, so there is a reason for the country to be optimistic. There is a consolidation in the shipping market, with lesser players getting in there, which is both a plus as well as a minus. **BW**

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