

At 65.6 mt, country's oldest port records its highest cargo traffic

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The country's oldest port, Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port, Kolkata (SMPK, formerly Kolkata Port Trust) has clocked in highest cargo traffic surpassing its previous best of 2019-20.

In FY23, SMPK handled 65.66 million tonnes (mt) of cargo, up 12.87 per cent over 58.175 mt in FY22. The previous high in FY20 was 63.983 mt.

The port recorded a net surplus of ₹304.07 crore in FY23 compared to ₹120.51 crore in the previous year. Its total income was Rs 2,919 crore in FY23 as against Rs 2,632 crore in FY22.

P L Haranadh, Chairman, SMPK, said, "For this 153-year-old port, the last finance year (FY23) was a game-changing year. In its history, the port has never seen this level of performance."

"Very few ports had seen a growth of 12.87 per cent," he added.

The achievement was on the back of a jump in rail borne cargo coupled with transshipment operations throughout the year that allowed capesize vessels to come to port.



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A major limitation for Haldia and Kolkata was the draught — a maximum of 8.5 to 7.3 metres — which meant that only smaller vessels could enter, said Haranadh. "Now, people are moving towards bigger vessels so that the logistic cost per tonne comes down. The transshipment operation improved substantially last year, which helped SMP overcome this problem," the Chairman explained. The port handled the highest ever rail borne cargo of 34.608 mt, a growth of 14.64 per cent.

A K Mehra, Deputy Chairman, Haldia Dock Complex, said the maximum cargo

increase was from coking coal for supply to SAIL and Tata Steel.

Landlord model

To augment the port's capacity, SMPK is stressing on PPP projects in a big way. More than 80 per cent of cargo handling operation would be under the landlord model or PPP mode, said the Chairman. "Cargo handling operation will be with the PPP operator, marine operation will be with the port," he added. The target was to reach 100 per cent cargo handling through PPP.

During FY23, the port awarded three major projects with investment of Rs 730 crore through the PPP mode. These three projects were expected to increase capacity by 6.7 mt.

Further, the port would be starting night navigation of the vessels destined to or originating from Kolkata Dock System, in association with Antwerp Port, Belgium and IIT Chennai. This would reduce the turnaround time of vessels and increase capacity.

The plan is to start with small vessels up to 100 metres by August 2023 and all vessels by March 2024.