



DELVING INTO THE RICH MARITIME HISTORY OF INDIA'S MUCH-ACCLAIMED KOLKATA PORT

Kolkata Port, recently renamed as Dr Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Port, after the legendary freedom fighter and a visionary, is the earliest major port in the country. The nucleus of the port lies much earlier - with the grant of trading rights to the British Settlement in Eastern India by the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb. In course of time, the power to rule this vast country passed from the East India Company to the British Crown. The Kolkata Port was initially conceived to promote and protect the British colonial interest and was, therefore, their premier port. In their earlier days, with the abolishing of slavery in 1833 there was a high demand of laborers on sugarcane plantations in the British Empire. The British used Kolkata port to transport over half a million Indians from all over India - mostly from the Hindi Belt, to places across the world, such as Mauritius, Fiji, South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Suriname, and other Caribbean islands as indentured laborers. The affairs of the Port were brought under the administrative control of the Government with the appointment of a Port Commission in 1870.

The port began its operations with river moorings and four screw pile jetties for general cargo while more jetties were constructed at the Budge Budge in 1886 to handle liquid cargo. In 1892, the sheltered impounded dock at Kidderpore (KPD) was constructed followed by the Netaji Subhas Docks in 1928, thus, enabling passage and handling of large ships and a variety of cargo through the port.

Though the port was conceived to be a commercial port and gateway of Eastern India, the port played a very important role in the Second World War and was bombed twice by the Japanese forces. After independence, the Commissioners for the Port of Kolkata were responsible for the port till January 1975 when Major Port Trusts Act, 1963, came into force. Being limited in draught, the sister dock at Haldia was developed in 1977 for the handling larger vessels with deeper draughts. The Port is now run by a Board of Trustees having representatives from the Government, Trade Bodies, various Port Users, Labour Unions and some nominated members.

Celebrating 150 years of Rich Maritime Heritage

The Kolkata Port Trust (KoPT) celebrated its 150th anniversary of coming into being, carrying with it the legacy of its glorious past. The port known for facilitating trade between India and other countries gained repute for being a conduit point for the movement of some of the most renowned freedom fighters before independence. Post India's independence, the port was largely used to transport project cargo for steel plants and industries set up under the early five-year plans in the country. In its 150th year, the port has taken a slew of initiatives relating to its human resource, infrastructure and the social sector.

Kolkata Port Infrastructure

Kolkata Port is the only riverine major port in India, situated 127 NM up the Hooghly River, having arguably the longest navigational channel in the world. The meandering river and its shifting sand bars make navigation through the river a challenging task. The port maintains a large force of trained river pilots to ensure safe navigation through the river. It has also set up automatic tide gauges at Tribeni, Garden Reach, Diamond Harbour and Haldia to

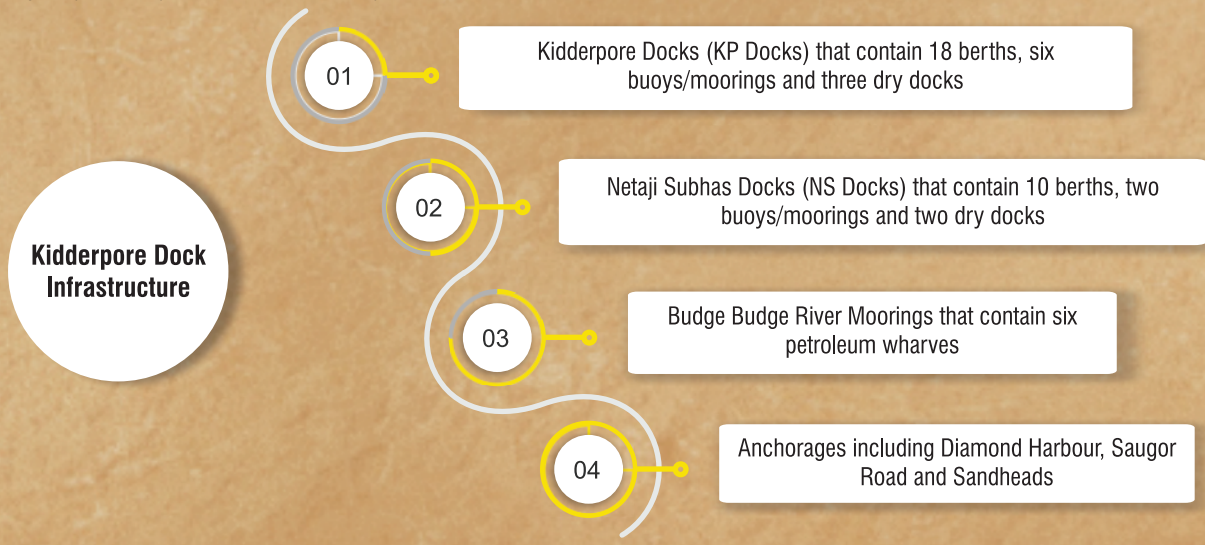




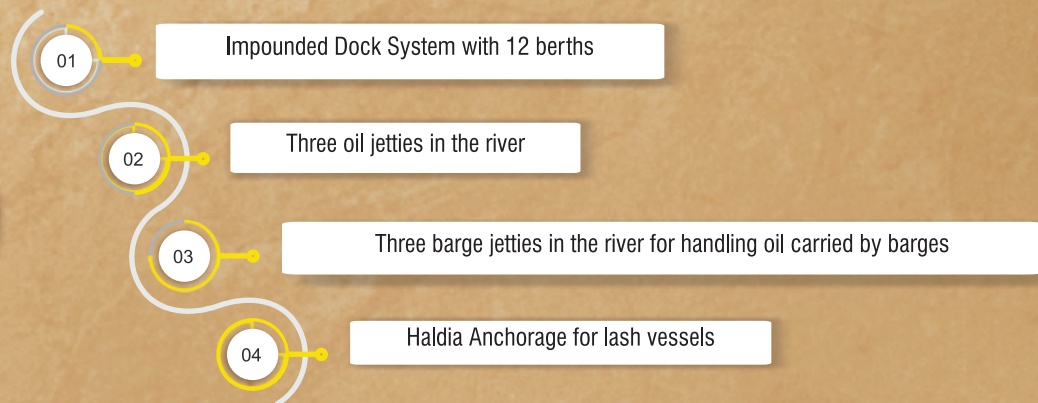
enable round-the-clock recording of tidal data that is then used to predict tides in addition to the preparation of tide tables by Survey of India. The river is well marked with over 500 navigational marks and buoys, of which 140 are lighted, to facilitate night navigation, pilotage and dredging.

The port's vast hinterland including the states like West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Assam, Madhya Pradesh and the country's entire northeast apart from neighbouring countries like Nepal and Bhutan explains the port's enormity in terms of structure and size. The volume throughput of cargo passing through the port underscores its strategic location in terms of trade.

The present-day port comprises of many docks and river berths including the Kidderpore Docking System (KDS), Netaji Subash Docks, both in Kolkata and the Haldia Docking Complex in Haldia. While the long navigational channel leading to the former is counted as one of the longest channels in the world, the latter is located on the right bank of the river roughly 125 kilometres away from the sea. An increasing infrastructural focus has led to better linking of the KoPT with highways, railways and national waterways.



Haldia Dock Infrastructure



The port has the largest dry dock facility in the country. These docks cater to the myriad repair and maintenance needs of vessels coming to the country's eastern ports. Moreover, these dry docks have shipbuilding facilities. Out of the total five dry docks in the port, three are in Kidderpore Dock while the remaining two are in Netaji Subhas Dock.

The port's location on NW-1 (Ganga) and its connectivity with NW-2 (Brahmaputra) through the Sundarbans and Bangladesh and to NW 5 (East Coast Canal integrated with Brahmani - Mahanadi Delta River System) at Geonkhali explains its increasing significance in terms of both passenger and cargo transport.

Modernisation is the key to development and preparing for the future. Kolkata port has taken several infrastructural developmental projects under the Ministry of Shipping's Sagarmala programme for upgrading its berthing facilities as also to meet the varying requirements of different cargo especially liquid cargo. Additionally, connectivity gaps have been addressed by implementing inland waterways, road and rail infrastructure projects.

Despite its being 126 miles away from the sea, Kolkata is, by far, the best choice for an Eastern gateway to this continental-country. Kolkata Port Trust remains one of the pioneering and most promising ports of India. Challenged by frequent calamities and natural hazards since its inception, the KoPT has continued to grow and develop over the years through improved efficiency standards, efficient mapping of its operations, capacity augmentation and adopting the tricks much needed to induce and ensure ease of doing business and redevelopment of its available assets.

