

East Coast Maritime Forum & Eastern Star Awards 2025 sees an engaging deliberation on key issues, followed by acclamation of excellence & success



The Forum panel discussion had as participants (from left) Mr Mannu Choudhary, Capt. Nitin Puri, Mr Bill Smart, Mr Pramod Kumar Srivastava, Mr Ravi Shankar Rajhans, Mr Debashis Dutta and Mr Pratap Singh Chauhan



Mr Bill Smart



Mr Ravi Shankar Rajhans



Mr Pramod Kumar Srivastava



Mr Debashis Dutta



Mr Ashok Janakiram



Mr A. K. Bose



Mr S. Hajara



Mr Sudip Dey

KOLKATA :
EXIM India's East Coast Maritime Forum 2025 - Shippers & LSP Forum & Eastern Star Awards 2025, the landmark 10th edition of the event, successfully brought together the wide spectrum of the industry (see box) in the region and beyond on Friday, January 10, 2025, at Royal Courtyard, Nicco Park, Kolkata, for a fascinating and thought-provoking discussion on ports, shipping, logistics and cargo facilitation in the eastern region, especially Kolkata, which was followed by an enthusing awards gala that acknowledged some of the best in the business.

The theme of this year's event was "Evolving Ecosystems: Sustainability in Eastern India's Cargo & Logistics". Some of the leading stakeholders participated in the Forum, with the panel discussion moderated by **Mr Pramod Kumar Srivastava, Director & CEO, The PDP Group**, which saw an engaging and forthright deliberation on the growth in Kolkata and the eastern region, while also addressing the pressing constraints that the sector faces.

Pertinent points made at the Forum

It was emphasised that the over 150-year Kolkata Port [now Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port (SMP)] has been continuously adapting to the changes taking place and

THE EMINENT PANELISTS

- ❖ **Bill Smart, Chief Executive, Bengal Tiger Line Pte Ltd., Singapore**
- ❖ **Ravi Shankar Rajhans, Traffic Manager, Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port**
- ❖ **Pramod Kumar Srivastava, Director & CEO, The PDP Group**
- ❖ **Debashis Dutta, Director, B. G. Somadder & Sons Pvt. Ltd.**
- ❖ **Capt. Nitin Puri, Regional Sr. Vice President – East India, MSC Agency (India) Private Limited**
- ❖ **Mannu Choudhary, Director, Masum Group**
- ❖ **Pratap Singh Chauhan, Head Exim, Jindal Stainless Limited**



has transformed from a bulk to container port, which is something unique. The port's capacity has been increased, infrastructure/equipment augmentation projects have been completed and are ongoing, berths are being mechanised, new services are being initiated, facilitations like regular Kolkata-Haldia rail service have been started, among others, it was pointed out. The port is focused on timely delivery of cargo and customer satisfaction.

It was also highlighted that the port is now capable of handling Capesize vessels.

The eastern region is growing, which in turn will benefit the entire logistics and supply chain. Stakeholders should join hands and work together to find solutions and solve problems, it was stressed.

There was a call made for better utilisation of assets at SMP, improved rail services, enhanced barge connections, and facilitation for main line vessels at anchorage. The eastern region has a lot more scope to grow, but port and overall infrastructure need further augmentation. That will attract bigger vessels, among other advantages.

Draught was mentioned as a major challenge.

The growth and facilitations at east coast ports like Paradip, Dhamra and Vizag were also lauded.

Digitisation has had an impact over the last decade, it was pointed out, especially in Customs procedures, enabling ease of doing business and seamless facilitation. This is true of the Bangladesh border as well. Digitisation is today critical for logistics and all stakeholders need to stay informed and be ready to adapt.

Among the things shippers are looking for are committed service from LSPs, removal of bottlenecks, faster transit by rail, and direct sailings if possible, it was pointed out.

The **Chief Guest** of the event was the illustrious **Mr Bill Smart, Chief Executive, Bengal Tiger Line Pte Ltd., Singapore**, who highlighted the growth of BTL in India from the maiden call with 23 TEUs 39 years ago to a throughput of half a million TEUs this year in and out.

His captivating address also called for a long-term, realistic vision for growth and success in the region, giving

the example of Singapore and its port. He highlighted some of the challenges like lack of draught, the waiting period for vessels and the limitations of the lock system at SMP. There is need for a deep-water facility, he said.

Besides, the pace of change in West Bengal has to be faster, with more investment so that the trade grows to cater to the logistics capacity. A main line vessel will only deviate to Kolkata if there is enough cargo.

He also touched upon the opportunities and praised the resilience of the logistics fraternity in Kolkata, the friends made and the relationships established in his over 35 years of association with India.

Overall, the Forum facilitated an interesting interaction among key stakeholders, encouraging collaborative discussions to find sustainable solutions to the challenges faced by the industry, innovative strategies to overcome constraints and leverage the region's strengths, paving the way for a more robust maritime ecosystem.

Mr A. K. Bose, Advisor (Traffic), Paradip Port Authority; Mr Ashok Janakiram, Director, Pennon Shipping Pvt. Ltd and President, ASIC; Mr Sudip Dey, Director, Haridass Chunder (Clearing Agents) Pvt. Ltd and Honorary Secretary, FFFAI; and Mr S. Hajara, Former CMD of SCI, were some of the other important dignitaries who graced the occasion.

Commending excellence at the Awards, worthy felicitation

The event concluded with the highly anticipated Eastern Star Awards 2025, a grand celebration that recognised excellence and innovation in the industry. It honoured the best performers and trailblazers among companies and individuals (in multiple categories) who have made significant contributions to the sector. The evening was a blend of excitement, recognition and celebration, with industry leaders coming together to laud achievements and inspire future success.

Among the highlights was Mr Prodip Kumar Sengupta of Orient Transport Company being presented the Lifetime Achievement Award, and Mr Bill Smart and Ms Prema

Krishnan of BTL receiving Special Recognitions.

Eastern Clearing & Forwarding Agency Pvt. Ltd. was felicitated for 75 years of excellence in providing comprehensive end-to-end logistics solutions and associated support services.

The Awards Jury, headed by Mr Pallab Bhatta, was also felicitated.

The East Coast Maritime Forum 2025 was a resounding success, providing a dynamic platform for stakeholders to discuss key issues, share insights, celebrate excellence, as well as avail of the opportunity to network. The event underscored the importance of addressing constraints while capitalising on growth opportunities to ensure the sustained development of the maritime sector in the eastern region.

A synopsis of the key points made and opinions expressed by the panelists follows.



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Some of the award winners

PERTINENT VIEWS AND SIGNIFICANT OPINIONS FROM SOME OF THE LEADING LIGHTS

Bill Smart, Chief Executive, Bengal Tiger Line Pte Ltd., Singapore (Chief Guest)

Mr Bill Smart, in a thought-provoking and candid address, outlined a few perspectives on the Eastern Gateway State and Port. He highlighted BTL's first sailing to Calcutta from Singapore 39 years ago with only 23 boxes onboard; today BTL handles up to a million TEUs per annum worldwide, of which 500,000 TEUs are still ex-im shipments to / from Indian shores, therefore India remains its core business. He advised that investing in India required the 3 P's – Patience, Perseverance which might eventually lead to Profit. Talking about the regional distribution of India's volumes, he emphasised the disparity in the annualised 24 million TEUs - where main Western ports accounted for 73%, the South East represented 21%, whilst Kolkata-Haldia & Vizag comprised only 6% at 1.3 m TEUs. Unless there is clear vision to create a deep water port facility, Kolkata remains a feeder port with 6 m drafts and lock gate beam restrictions of 25 m, he said. He also pointed out that West Bengal's GDP contribution had halved from 10% to the current 5% levels, reflecting a lack of investment confidence. However, he remarked that positive possibilities lie in West Bengal's location not only for local cargoes but also as a gateway for hinterland access to neighbouring countries like Nepal, and once government initiatives to promote themselves as a desirable investment destination work, then the key still remains the port. He also spoke positively on several local infrastructure initiatives including Adani's successful takeover of the NSD CY operations, floating cranes at Diamond Harbour, acceptance of night navigation, and plans for gantry operations at berths 7 & 8.



Pramod Kumar Srivastava, Director & CEO, The PDP Group (Welcome Address, Theme Presentation & Moderator)

Mr Pramod Kumar Srivastava began by calling for further development of coastal/barge services connecting Kolkata. He appreciated the Haldia to Pandu service, which has been provided a subsidy, and hoped that it would be beneficial to the trade. Barge services to the North East, to states like Tripura, would be helpful in reducing logistics cost. The current situation in Bangladesh is a bit of a problem, but he expressed the hope it would stabilise soon. He also called for optimum utilisation of the underutilised rail sidings near the port with more services, which could be facilitated by the trade. Access should be granted to all. It would make things easier for the trade, especially for handling factory-stuffed containers. A special SOP could be developed with the port for making this happen, he said. The port could also consider barge services to connect to the main line vessels. Innovative solutions are needed, like the current direct services connecting Kolkata, he stressed.

Ravi Shankar Rajhans, Traffic Manager, Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port (Panelist)

Mr Ravi Shankar Rajhans, talking about rail facilitation, said a rake examination facility has been introduced at the port, which is something unique and hugely beneficial. He highlighted the Kolkata-Haldia regular rail service and encouraged the trade to use the rail facilities, like players are already doing. More sidings will come up, and whatever facilitation is required will be done. The port is ready to come up with a special dispensation for this, he said. He emphasised that the port has survived for over 150 years because of its adaptability to changes and customer focus. Its transformation from a bulk cargo handling port to a container handling facility is an example. He highlighted the port's capacity increase, completed expansion projects, CAGR and ability to deliver cargo on time, adding that more capacity enhancement projects are under implementation both at Kolkata and Haldia. A liquid cargo handling facility will be developed, floating crane will be brought in to tackle the issue of draught, berth mechanisation projects are progressing etc., he said. Also, more international connectivity is coming, with proposed plans for feeder services to South East Asia locations, Colombo, besides domestic connections. He additionally made the point that ports can only grow with the growth of industry.



Debashis Dutta, Director, B. G. Somadder & Sons Pvt. Ltd. (Panelist)

Mr Debashis Dutta stressed on stakeholders in the cargo and logistics fraternity working together to overcome the challenges. The eastern region is growing and so is the fraternity, he said, exuding positivity. He called for all to work in tandem and like a family to further advance the sector in the region and tackle the challenges that arise. Draft is an issue, yet infrastructure has been created at Kolkata Port to handle Capesize vessels. It is a dream come true. There were challenges but the fraternity came together to make it happen, he said. He lauded the Kolkata-Haldia rail movement and said that LSPs, lines should invest in barges to boost connectivity. The port has to be supported by barge owners. Highlighting a stakeholder initiative, he appreciated Mr Pramod Kumar Srivastava for creating infrastructure to facilitate the Durgapur, Asansol regions.

Capt. Nitin Puri, Regional Sr. Vice President – East India, MSC Agency (India) Private Limited (Panelist)

Capt. Nitin Puri said that lines are augmenting their services in the eastern region despite the constraints. Ports have infrastructure issues that are obstacles to more services. There should be faster evacuation of cargo. So the focus has to be on infrastructure enhancement, he stressed. There is a lot of scope for the eastern region to grow further, in tune with the overall growth of the country, as well as scope for more India-China trade. In Kolkata, if the lines are able to handle vessels at anchorage with floating crane, given the draft situation, bigger vessels will come, he said, adding that mother vessels are today not coming because of infrastructure issues.



Mannu Choudhary, Director, Masum Group (Panelist)

Mr Mannu Choudhary emphasised that the digital era is well and truly underway in logistics, with new technological innovations being increasingly adopted over the last decade. Digitisation and automaton of processes have facilitated seamless coordination among the many stakeholders in cargo and logistics, bringing about transparency and reducing cost and time. He lauded Kolkata Port Customs for its digital facilitation, like faceless assessment, single window platform for clearances, faster NOC process etc. Besides, access permits are faster through single window and there is real-time carting, among other advantages. Relevant permits required at the Bangladesh border can also be generated from office, saving cost and time. The e-way bill issued with QR code too can be tracked. It is important that the fraternity stays informed and is ready to implement what is necessary in terms of technology, he said. He also stressed on the need for upgrading skills to be abreast of the technological changes.

Pratap Singh Chauhan, Head Exim, Jindal Stainless Limited (Panelist)

Mr Pratap Singh Chauhan presented the shipper viewpoint, saying that shippers are looking for committed service from logistics service providers at competitive cost so that they are able to compete both internationally and domestically. He touched upon port cost, the need for better processes, faster and smoother rail operations, transit time commitment etc. There exists significant opportunities in Eastern India for containers, bulk cargo. Ports like Vizag and Paradip are expanding. However, there are bottlenecks that need to be removed. Shippers want enhanced services, he stressed.



Eastern Star Awards 2025 marked by deserving recognition and enthusiastic appreciation from a full house



LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD



MR. PRODIP KUMAR SENGUPTA
 ORIENT TRANSPORT COMPANY

MAJOR PORT OF THE YEAR - CONTAINERISED CARGO & NON-CONTAINERISED CARGO



SYAMA PRASAD MOOKERJEE PORT
 (CONTAINERISED CARGO)



PARADIP PORT AUTHORITY
 (NON-CONTAINERISED CARGO)

NON MAJOR PORT OF THE YEAR



THE DHAMRA PORT COMPANY LTD.

CONTAINER HANDLING TERMINAL OF THE YEAR



VISAKHA CONTAINER TERMINAL PVT. LTD.

SHIPPING AGENT OF THE YEAR - CONTAINER



SAMSARA GROUP

SHIPPING AGENT OF THE YEAR - BREAK BULK OPERATOR



SEAHORSE SHIP AGENCIES PVT. LTD.

FEEDER OPERATOR OF THE YEAR



SAMUDERA SHIPPING LINE (I) PVT. LTD.

NVOCC OF THE YEAR



EXPRESSWAY CONTAINER LINE LLP

LCL CONSOLIDATOR OF THE YEAR



GLOBELINK WW INDIA PVT. LTD.

END-TO-END LOGISTICS SOLUTION PROVIDER OF THE YEAR



SMP INTERNATIONAL LOGISTICS & CNF SERVICE

FREIGHT FORWARDER OF THE YEAR



(On basis of Volume) -
VIVEK FREIGHT & LOGISTICS PVT. LTD.



(On basis of Growth) -
SPEEDWAYS LOGISTICS PVT. LTD.

CUSTOMS BROKER OF THE YEAR (EXPORT)



(On basis of Volume) -
P. D. PRASAD & SONS PVT. LTD.



(On basis of Growth) -
SDLS LOGISTICS PVT. LTD.

CUSTOMS BROKER OF THE YEAR (IMPORT)



(On basis of Volume) -
NKD LOGISTICS PVT. LTD.



(On basis of Growth) -
PROTOCOL INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT SERVICES PVT. LTD.

**CUSTOMS BROKER OF THE YEAR
(LIQUID BULK CARGO)**



EASTERN CLEARING & FORWARDING AGENCY PVT. LTD.

**CUSTOMS BROKER OF THE YEAR -
NEPAL CARGO**



TRANS LOG-SHIP PVT. LTD.

CUSTOMS BROKER OF THE YEAR (REEFER CONTAINER)



(In Export Segment) -
BISWAS & ASSOCIATES PVT. LTD.



(In Import Segment) -
SNB AGENCY

**ROAD TRANSPORT -
FLEET OPERATOR & OWNER OF THE YEAR**



M/s MOHD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN

**INLAND CONTAINER DEPOT OPERATOR
OF THE YEAR**



ALLIED ICD SERVICES LTD.

**CONTAINER FREIGHT STATION OPERATOR
OF THE YEAR (KOLKATA)**



PHONEX LOGISTICS PVT. LTD.

**CONTAINER FREIGHT STATION OPERATOR
OF THE YEAR (HALDIA)**



A. L. LOGISTICS PVT. LTD.

**CONTAINER FREIGHT STATION OPERATOR
OF THE YEAR (VISAKHAPATNAM)**



SRAVAN SHIPPING SERVICES PVT. LTD.

**ROAD TRANSPORT OPERATOR
OF THE YEAR (NEPAL CARGO)**



JAYESH LOGISTICS LIMITED

FREIGHT FORWARDER OF THE YEAR - BREAK BULK / PROJECT CARGO



**(In Project Cargo Segment) -
M. K. AGENCY**



**(In Break Bulk Cargo Segment) -
KYC CARGO SERVICES PVT. LTD.**

PROJECT CARGO MOVER OF THE YEAR



PRISM LOGISTICS PVT. LTD.

CONTAINER SHIPPING LINE OF THE YEAR - EUROPE TRADE LANE



MEDITERRANEAN SHIPPING COMPANY

CONTAINER SHIPPING LINE OF THE YEAR - FAR EAST TRADE LANE



**(On basis of Volume) -
REGIONAL CONTAINER LINES**



**(On basis of Growth) -
SITC CONTAINER LINES**

CONTAINER SHIPPING LINE OF THE YEAR - AMERICA TRADE LANE



MEDITERRANEAN SHIPPING COMPANY

CONTAINER SHIPPING LINE OF THE YEAR - AFRICA TRADE LANE



MEDITERRANEAN SHIPPING COMPANY

SHIPPING & LOGISTICS FAMILY BUSINESS AWARD



M. L. CHOPRA SHIPPING PVT. LTD.

SPECIAL JURY AWARD TO GLOBAL ICON FOR LIFETIME CONTRIBUTION TO SHIPPING SECTOR (FOCUS INDIA - FEEDER)



**MR. BILL SMART
BENGAL TIGER LINE PTE LTD., SINGAPORE**

SPECIAL RECOGNITION AWARD TO WOMAN ROLE MODEL IN MARITIME INDUSTRY



MS. PREMA KRISHNAN
BENGAL TIGER LINE INDIA PVT. LTD.

YOUNG LOGISTICS PROFESSIONAL OF THE YEAR



MR. AADITYA SINGH
SPEEDWAYS LOGISTICS PVT. LTD.

GenNext ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR



MR. ABHAY SURANA
FREYA SHIPPING SERVICES PVT. LTD.

LOGISTICS COMPANY OF THE YEAR



ACS SHIPPING PRIVATE LIMITED

WOMAN PROFESSIONAL OF THE YEAR



MS. MOUSUMI MUKHERJEE
JMR FREIGHT FORWARDER PVT. LTD.

FAST GROWING ICD OPERATOR OF THE YEAR IN ODISHA



JSL LOGISTICS LIMITED

THE EMINENT JURY WAS FELICITATED

JURY CHAIRMAN

- ❖ Mr. Pallab Bhatta, Associate Vice President, Electrosteel Castings Limited

JURY MEMBERS

- ❖ Mr. Swapan Kumar Gupta, Branch Manager, Samudera Shipping Line (I) Pvt. Ltd.
- ❖ Mr. Saket Choudhary, Director, Vivek Freight & Logistics Pvt. Ltd.
- ❖ Mr. Prithwish Biswas, Director, Biswas And Associates Pvt. Ltd.
- ❖ Mr. Sourav Biswas, Branch Manager, Trans Asian Shipping Services Pvt. Ltd.



Members of the Awards Jury present were felicitated by Mr Ravi Shankar Rajhans (second from left), Traffic Manager, Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port. They were Mr Sourav Biswas (left), Mr Pallab Bhatta and Mr Prithwish Biswas (third and fourth from left)

THE FRATERNITY WAS PRESENT IN STRENGTH





Thank You



Event Partners, Speakers, Panelists, Jury & Delegates
for making

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