

27/06/2001

Westport a major player in the industry

Kang Siew Li

FOR a seven-year-old port, Westport has many milestones to reckon with. One of the most recent significant achievements was when it was voted the Seventh Best Container Terminal at the 15th Asian Freight Industry Awards (AFIA), organised yearly for the industry in Asia by Hong Kong-based Cargonews Asia, last year.

Besides this award, Westport has received the 1999 AFIA Top 10 Container Terminal Award, 2000 FIABCI Award of Distinction for Best Public Sector Development and 2000 US International Film and Video Festival Silver Screen Award for its "Port of the New Millennium" advertising campaign.

Since its inception on November 2 1994, Westport has rapidly progressed to become a major player in the port industry.

"Westport plays a key role in the country's infrastructure development as an entry point that handles project cargo that comes into the country for local developments," said Tan Sri G. Gnanalingam, executive chairman of Kelang Multi Terminal Sdn Bhd, the operator of Westport.

"A few months ago, rail project cargo being used in the rail links in Johor were received by the terminal and shuttled down via road haulage. Other equipment and project cargo for various hydro-electric projects have also entered via Westport," he added.

Gnanalingam pointed out that the very signature Westport tower block and famed "skyroofed" business centre of Westport has also lent a strong identity to the country's superior and modern infrastructure inclinations. "Requests are constantly received from various media and television sectors to feature this part of the port that elevates the port scene to the impressive statures of airports of modern cities around the world."

Westport, which is located at Pulau Indah to the west of Port Klang, is a modern port equipped with cranes designed to handle large vessels of over 5,000 TEUs (20-foot equivalent unit) containers.

Westport has a depth of 15 metres which allows large ships to berth while the post-panamax quay cranes have an outreach of over 17 containers. It has two types of terminal - one for conventional berths (dry and liquid bulk such as petroleum) and a container terminal.

Westport's container terminal began operations with the arrival of 2,850 TEUs container vessel called Norasia Kiel of the Europe-based Norasia Lines, in March 1996.

It made history when it played host to the world's newest and largest container ship, 6,600 TEUs Clifford Maersk of Maersk Line, in December 1999. The port scored a record with 264 moves per hour using six cranes on the Clifford Maersk.

The container terminal once again made history in December last year when it handled 1.03 million TEUs. In 1999, it handled 830,000 TEUs.

Already, Westport is gearing up to handle 1.6 million TEUs this year.

Westport's conventional terminal also created history when it discharged 5,197 tonnes of loose logs in a record 56 hours in February this year. It handled 6.6 million tonnes in 1999 and seven million tonnes last year.

The conventional terminal achieved another milestone in its operations when a fully laden Panamax vessel - "MV Pantanassa" - discharged all its 58,800 tonnes of maize at its facilities in April this year.

Westport is served by three expressways - the North Klang Valley Expressway, the Kuala Lumpur-Port Klang Federal Highway and the Shah Alam Expressway - which link it to the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah Airport in Subang

and the KL International Airport in Sepang.

In line with the country's progress rate, Gnanalingam said Westport is also on its way to an accelerated 2020 standing.

"In six short years, we have already achieved what some ports around the world have taken 20 years to achieve both in infrastructure development as well as throughput volumes," he said.

Gnanalingam added that since its launch in 1994, Westport has become a facility to be reckoned with not only within the region but throughout the world.

"For example, if we take container operations, we see a steady increase in vessel calls which has exceeded by more than 400 per cent since 1996 (when container operations began) from a mere 80 calls in 1996 to 2,584 calls last year.

"This is a result of having a supply-driven approach taken to remain competitive by ensuring that it has the necessary capacity, efficiency and reliability that will induce customer growth and throughput expansion. Westport has a capacity to handle 2.4 million TEUs with storage capacity of 3.3 million container boxes," he said.

Today, 21 main line operators call at Westport. They comprise China Shipping Container Line, Maersk, Sealand, Evergreen, Hanjin Shipping, Uniglory, Compagnie Maritime D Affretement/Compagnie Generale Maritime, Senator Line, Norasia, NSCSA, Lloyd Triestino, Malaysia International Shipping Corporation Bhd, Gold Star Line, China Ocean Shipping Container Line, K-Line, APL, Contship, United Arab Shipping Co, the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines, Yan Ming Line and Tasman Orient Line.

Gnanalingam said despite the slowing economy, Westport has some interesting opportunities at its doorstep that it can and will exploit in these times.

"This includes a limitless transshipment growth rate. Port Klang has grown from 10,000 TEUs in 1996 to 100,000 TEUs in 1997 to 250,000 TEUs in 1998 and 500,000 TEUs in 1999 and well above one million TEUs last year. In Jawa alone, there are four million boxes and the Indian Ocean has another 2 million boxes, which can be transhipped out of Port Klang.

"We have numerous value-adding services at Westport that will save cost for our mainlines as well as bring revenue to the terminal. These include repositioning and maintenance of empty containers, cleaning of tank containers and bunkering at a competitive price," Gnanalingam explained.

He believes that once the Asean (Association of South East Asian Nations) Free Trade Area is established, there will be opportunities for value-adding services both in terms of container freight station and distripark facilities within the port areas that will boost transshipment with value-adding services for redistribution of cargo.

The Government's call on Malaysian importers and exporters to use local ports has also given Westport the added edge with increased throughput both at the container and conventional terminals.

Port Klang consists of two ports, North Port and Westport. North Port, which is managed by Klang Container Terminal and Kelang Port Management, contributed about 70 per cent to Port Klang's total container traffic or 2 million TEUs. Westport accounts for the remainder.

Hutchison Whampoa, regarded as one of the world's top three most influential companies in port management is looking to reposition Westport's role as a regional cargo center after acquiring a 30 per cent stake in the company for RM400 million (\$105 million) through Hong Kong International Terminal (HIT).

Moves are said to be underway to set up a new business development unit at the port to tap opportunities from across the region.

Commenting on the country's infrastructure development, Gnanalingam said

Malaysia has developed rapidly in the last 20 years that it can now proudly say that it has gone ahead of its time when compared with the norm in infrastructural developments.

He attributed the far-sightedness of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and the bold infrastructural ventures endeavoured by the Government, "which have certainly put us in the 2020 era ahead of many others who started out with us in the region".

"Malaysia is well-known for its excellent connectivity by air, rail and road. This has been possible because of the Government's foresight in being supply driven in all areas including the infrastructural aspects of linking the Peninsular all the way from Thailand in the north to Singapore in the south and even the east coast.

"And today with such projects as KL Sentral launched linking the heart of the capital to the KL International Airport at Sepang and key outskirt areas, I must say we have the right people already doing the right things with a focus for continued improvement," Gnanalingam said.

(END)