

## BACKGROUND AND THE CREATION

- 1.0 The use of waterways by mechanised vessels in Bangladesh began more than 150 years ago. Lord William Bentinck was the name of the first inland steamer vessel that propelled in the river Ganges in 1834. The steamer was owned by the Government. The India General Navigation and Railway Company Ltd. (IGNR), the first inland steamer company was floated on February 6, 1844. During the latter part of the nineteenth century (1880-1899) as many as 898 vessels used to ply the route from Calcutta to Khulna through the Sundarbans per annum. In the first quarter of the twentieth century the number rose to 4803.
- 2.0 During the Pakistan period eight principal operators organised IWT operation. Those were (I) B.R.S. Company (II) I.G.N.R. Company Ltd. (III) Pak-Bay Company, (IV) B.R.S. Company Ltd. (V) Pak Flotilla, (VI) Chalna Lighterage, (VII) Sinclair Murray and (VIII) E.B. Railway Flotilla. Both R.S.N. and I.G.N.R. were British Companies with registered offices in London. Those two Companies carried as much as 70% of cargo and passenger traffic. B.R.S. was an Indian company with registered office in Calcutta.
- 3.0 During the British period the river conservancy work was carried out generally by the two big companies R.S.N. and I.G.N.R. As such improvement and development of IWT sector were conditioned by private motives of the companies. The development of inland ports and terminal facilities and ancillary services for a smooth and safe navigation were adjuncts to the commercial requirements of the individual operators. There was no provision for governmental control and maintenance of waterways. The river conservancy work was carried out at the district level by the companies. Each district was headed by a Pilot Superintendent comprising a large establishment of pilots and surveyors grouped together and placed along the navigational routes. Each group used to cover a specified length of the waterways. They used to inspect the channels regularly using country boats and measured depth with bamboos and other materials and demarcated the deepest part or the shallow area with bamboo sticks. Whenever a vessel arrived in a particular pilot station a Pilot went on board and guided the master of the vessel for negotiating the river.
- 4.0 In the early part of this century not much improvement was done on the waterways for navigation except in the Madaripur Beel route. The first dredger acquired in 1907 for the improvement of navigation was "Foyer". Utilising this dredger the Madhumati river, the Madaripur Beel route, the lower Kumar and Gopalganj loop were excavated. The second dredger called "Alexandra" was purchased afterwards. Thus dredging was introduced in the river conservancy work. But still many problems were unattended. During British period the Halifax cut was made. The Gabkhan Khal, an existing narrow creek between the mighty tidal rivers was excavated and moderately widened.
- 5.0 The Inland Waterways Bill was passed by the Bengal Legislature in 1934. This would have set up a Waterways Board. Unfortunately the act was never put into operation. Since the creation of Pakistan however several proposals were made by the various experts and agencies for the creation of a competent statutory organisation for the management, operation and development of IWT sector. The experts, agencies and committees which proposed creation of such an organisation were:
 

(i) United States Steel Survey Mission	Year 1948
(ii) UN Inland Water Transport Study Group	1951
(iii) UN Report by J.G. Surie on IWT of India and Pakistan	1953
(iv) IWT conferences East Pakistan	1952 & 56
(v) Ad-hoc Committee on IWT appointed by the Central Govt	1955-56
(vi) UN Report by J.J. Krugg on Water Resources of East Pakistan	1955-56
(vii) World Bank Survey Mission	1957
(viii) ICA Survey Mission	1957
(ix) First five year plan by the Planning Commission	1957
(x) IWT enquiry committee (Sobhan Committee) set up by the Central Govt.	1958

Though many proposals were made from time to time for the creation of a statutory organisation to look after the IWT, no effective steps were taken until Oct, 1958.

- 6.0 To set up an Authority for development, maintenance and control of inland water transport and of certain inland navigable waterways, the then East Pakistan Government on 31st October, 1958 promulgated an ordinance called the East Pakistan Inland Water Transport Authority Ordinance, 1958 (E. P. Ordinance, No LXXV of 1958). On November 4, 1958 the Government by an order constituted a two member Authority of East Pakistan Inland Water Transport Authority (EPIWTA) and appointed Mr. S. Masood Hossain as Chairman and Mr. M. B. Abbas A. T as part time Member. Mr. Masood Hossain was then Director of Navigation, Central Engineering Authority, Government of Pakistan while Mr. Abbas was Chief Engineer, Flood Control Organisation, Government of East Pakistan. Mr. S. Masood Hossain took over the responsibilities of his office on November 18, 1958 and with him as the first Chairman, EPIWATA came into existence. Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) is the successor of the erstwhile EPIWTA.
- 7.0 With the formation of the Authority it was felt necessary to obtain the services of personnel experienced in specialised disciplines such as conservancy and pilotage, transportation economics, port engineering, hydrography etc. in order to carry out the chartered functions of the Authority. Thus Capt. L. Spaulding and Capt Kean of the then RSN & IGN were appointed in the Conservancy and Pilotage Department. Mr. H. K. Vazir, a transportation economist and Deputy Provincial Transport Commissioner for Traffic joined the Traffic Department. Mr. S. H. Khoja, a retired Port Engineer of Madras Port took over as Port Engineer. Admiral (Retd.) S. A. Schank of U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey Department and Commander (Retd.) R. K. Husband of British Royal Navy were appointed to organise the hydrographic survey services. Thus, in 1958-59 IWTA consisted of Traffic, Conservancy & Pilotage, Waterways & Port Engineering, Accounts and Secretariate departments.
- 8.0 These Departments, in turn, formed the nucleus of the IWTA headquarter organisation, while field offices still remained to be set up. During 1958-59 a total of 37 officers were recruited to carry out the functions of the newly constituted Authority.
- 8.1 The Department of Planning was set up in March, 1963 to prepare development schemes, obtain approval of the Government and to monitor the schemes under execution. Dr. Akhlaqur Rahman an eminent economist was appointed as the first Director of Planning.
- 8.2 The Port Directorate was set up in 1964-65 to manage the operations of the five newly established river ports. On August 12, 1965, Port and Traffic Departments were merged into one department and named as Port and Traffic Department.
- 8.3 Over the years the Conservancy & Pilotage Department considerably expanded its activities in several distinct disciplines such as (i) Conservancy & Pilotage, (ii) Hydrographic Survey, (iii) Repair & maintenance of IWTA fleet, (iv) Operation of Dredgers and (v) Training of Deck Personnel of IWT vessels. For more efficient management and operations of these activities, the Authority in 1973 separated the above functions and created the different departments namely: (i) Conservancy and Pilotage, (ii) Hydrography and (iii) Marine and Mechanical Engineering. Afterwards the Marine Workshop at Barisal was given a separate entity like a department. The Deck Personnel Training Centre was also taken out of the control of the C & P Department and was given the status of a separate department.
- 8.4 Initially, Finance and Audit branches were under a single Director of Finance and Accounts. Over the years it was felt that a check and balance was necessary over the financial functions of the Authority. As such Finance and Audit were made full fledged separate departments.
- 8.5 Dredging is one of the important means employed to maintain the navigability of waterways and assumed considerable importance over the years due to deteriorating condition of the rivers. The IDA Mission on IWT of Bangladesh recommended that a separate Unit should be created for smooth and efficient operation of dredging. As such a Dredging Unit within the Authority has been established in 1991.