

Quote by Davinder Sandhu, Chairman and Co-Founder, Primus Partners

Published in The Free Press Journal

October 13, 2026

Port boom risks getting stuck in shallows

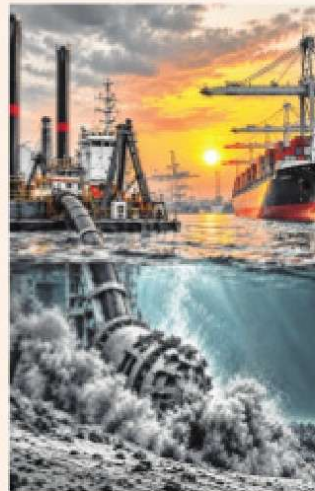
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MUMBAI

India is building ports at speed, but some of its maritime ambition risks being stranded by what lies beneath the hull. Delays in deploying specialised dredgers could generate logistics inefficiencies of up to ₹4,000 cr annually, according to Primus Partners, exposing an awkward capability gap in a sector central to India's trade machine.

DEPTH DEFICIT

The report argues that concrete, cranes and terminals are only part of port economics. Without sufficient navigational depth, larger vessels cannot berth fully laden, forcing ships to operate below optimal loads, raising unit freight costs and eroding the economics of port calls. That matters when maritime routes carry roughly 95% of Indian trade by volume and 70% by value. Port capacity has almost doubled from 1,400



MMTPA in 2013-14 to 2,762 MMTPA in 2024-25. Average turnaround time at major ports has meanwhile fallen from 94 hrs to 48.06 hrs. Yet inadequate draught risks leaving portions of this costly infrastructure commercially under-utilised.

CLEARANCE DRAG

India still requires foreign dredgers for deep channels, hard-strata excavation and

Delayed dredger deployment threatens port efficiency and trade competitiveness, while domestic vessel manufacturing could transform a costly weakness into opportunity

complex capital works. Primus argues that the answer is not weaker scrutiny, but quicker bureaucracy: a unified digital system linking maritime authorities, MoPSW, MHA, MoD, MEA and customs, with parallel processing, standardised documentation and risk-based assessments.

Davinder Sandhu, chairman and co-founder of Primus Partners, said foreign vessels required today should define what India manufactures tomorrow. The report proposes a ₹20,000-cr strategic dredger mfg window: ₹10,000 cr through the shipbuilding financial assistance

scheme, ₹4,000 cr through the shipbuilding development scheme and ₹6,000 cr through the Maritime Development Fund.

INDUSTRIAL PRIZE

The economic prize extends beyond ports. Faster dredging could improve vessel productivity, reduce freight friction and sharpen export competitiveness. Domestic manufacturing could create high-value shipyard orders, deepen marine-engineering supply chains, generate skilled employment and reduce dependence on imported specialised tonnage.

For exporters and manufacturers, more efficient ports could mean shorter vessel delays, better schedule reliability and lower logistics overheads. The policy choice is unusually stark: India can keep building impressive capacity above water, or develop the specialised capabilities beneath it required to make those investments pay fully.

