

# ‘Cochin Saga’

published after 48 years.

The third edition of “Cochin Saga”, the book authored by Sir Robert Bristow was released by **Prof. M K Sanu by handing over copies to Sri N S Madhavan and Dr K N Raghavan** Commissioner of Customs in a function at the Port conference hall. Dr C Unnikrishnan Port Traffic Manager and Sri K G Nath Port Financial Advisor spoke in the meeting chaired by Sri Paul Antony Chairman of the Port. Prof Sanu described Sir Bristow as great institution builder. Sri Madhavan recalled using Cochin Saga as a major reference material while writing his book *‘Landhanbatheriyile Luthiniyakal’*

The “Saga” was first published in 1959 and a second edition followed in 1967. The third edition comes after 48 years when copies are unavailable.

The author, Sir Robert Bristow, is revered as the architect of the modern port of Cochin, having led the epic efforts to create the Willingdon Island and the berths that facilitated shore berthing of vessels which earlier had to berth in open seas and cargo was transferred by lighters. The book is much sought after as the author, an Admiralty harbour Engineer consolidates a very big canvas of subjects including maritime history, geography, economy of the port, social life and religion in addition to the minute details of the port modernisation project of two decades.

The book is considered to be an authentic record of events during the period 1920-41, which witnessed the milestone events like breaking of the sand bar across Cochin gut, reclamations of the lake, formation of the island, creation of berths, making of the two land bridges ( Venduruthy rail and road bridge and Thoppumpady bascule bridge) and building of Mattancherry wharf warehouses. The book gives a first person account of the huge challenges faced by the author which include

- (1) Concluding of the four party agreement to finance the construction of cochin port. (Parties are Cochin, Travancore, Madras Presidency and Government of India each had their own demands which had to be balanced). Fund availability was linked to

the honouring of the agreement by new administrators of each participant at various points of time and Bristow had to consistently address their concerns and suspicions.

- (2) Breaking of sand bar across Cochin gut braving outcries that Vypeen Island will sink if the sand bar is broken. (Bristow had done extensive studies and created parallel protective groynes (*pulimuttu*) in the sea for safety of Vypeen before breaking the bar to allow vessels to come in to the inner harbour)
- (3) Limitation in equipment for work. He had dredger Lord Willingdon made in London in 1926 designed specifically for Cochin at most competitive price.
- (4) Resistance from various interest groups. He quotes for example; the revolts from the owners of the lighters (big boats which transferred cargo to ship berthed in outer seas earlier) who lost income after the ships began to berth at the newly created wharves along the Willingdon Island. At one time they offered to withdraw their resistance if the Port offered to share Rs.5/- per ton out of port revenue for loss of work (*In lighter vain, Bristow faced the first demand of Nokkukooli*).
- (5) Lack of support, at times, from certain ministers of Madras presidency who wanted some other port of their choice to be developed. Lord Willingdon often had to come to rescue of Bristow. Suspicions also were raised against the engineering plans he had drawn up considering the limitation and special features of Cochin. He had to get his plans validated from experts in London to proceed which had resulted in loss of time.

The book provides interesting reading due to the presence of large number of anecdotes revolving around social life in Cochin during the period. The book also gives the fine examples of valuable contribution from workers charged with motivation in being part of creating the new port of Cochin.

The findings from his deep research in to local phenomenon like the formation of the mud banks (*chaakara*) off the coast of Cochin and Malabar is enlightening. The present edition of the book also carries two chapters giving a different face of Bristow's personality. The first Chapters include his speeches and article analysing India's social

and cultural life with deep insights on institutions like marriage, education and religion. The second chapter of these isa treatise by Bristow on the Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo as enunciated in 'Life Divine " .

The edition is published by Bristow Memorial Society and edited by Dr C Unnikrishan. Cover design by Shaji Arakkal. The proceeds from the sale of the book is being used for developing the Cochin Port Maritime Heritage Museum functioning in the Port area which houses a large collection of pictures from the Bristow period on the various stages of work of making of Cochin Port.

**The book is priced at Rs 300 and available at the Museum.(0484 2582199)**