

Steering Into Deeper Seas

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Second generation businessmen may not be blessed as the pioneers. The missing legend behind the struggle for enterprise accounts largely for this, thanks to which the credit for performance gets discounted.

Mr Nigel Cabral, managing partner, Westcoast Shipyard, an established company, is a lucky exception.

In Goa's small pitch of industry and trade, his is a success story which should be emulated by others. Acknowledged for continuing with growth, Mr Cabral is credited for steering his company into the big league of indigenous shipbuilders. And, despite not being an entrepreneur in the true sense of the term, his guidance is sought by entrepreneurs through his role as the president of 'Young Entrepreneurs Forum' set up by the Goa Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Clearly the man is on a roll.

What does he have to say about it? The answer comes depreciatingly and with a smile, "I guess I came in at an importunate time. I lived in the US for seven years initially studying and then working. I came back in 2008 for some personal reasons only to see a lot of opportunities here," Mr Cabral informs adding, "Iron ore prices had shot up in the international market setting off the export boom in Goa. It led to a sudden demand for more barges to ferry the ore. So, like many others we benefited from our four barges while side-by-side the ship repairs division did extremely well."

Still not everybody can spot the big break. The accolades are brushed aside as he elaborates, "After the demise of my father, me and my younger brother Osrice Cabral handled the business jointly. So, the credit goes to both. He looks after the technical side and I handle the commerce side."

However, the younger brother says, "Nigel's business school background is instrumental in growth. It helps in getting the work orders, negotiating terms with customers, entering into tie-ups and generally consolidating the position, all of which is reflected in Westcoast Shipyard's changing product mix."

In recent years, the company has been veering slowly towards the more specialised area of ship-building thereby the turnover trebled. The firm now makes larger and larger vessels for customers in Goa and outside the state, building river barges, container vessels and ferryboats. The biggest order is under execution; a 4000 DWT container ship for a Norwegian company. Besides, talks are on with the Indian Navy for supplying ships to them, and

in another first an attempt to start the construction of dredgers.

Points out Mr Nigel Cabral, "We can always continue with focusing on ship repairs and operating barges. That is a good business to be in as the margins are healthy and we have the necessary skills. Yet, that can never catapult us into the top. In Goa we currently rank among the top three in shipbuilding. In the future we plan to go in for more complex vessels where the profit margin is higher."

Meanwhile, like a true entrepreneur, the man is also looking at spreading his wings. His family business includes a hotel in Colva and also farming. "Soya cultivation in our land has possibilities, while turning the hotel into a boutique resort is also an option. For the present however, it is shipbuilding which be the focus."