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## ON TOP OF THE WORLD

Rachana Mukherjee is set to revolutionise city transport system with a curved ropeway network to ferry commuters in some of the busiest parts of Kolkata. She tells **Hemchhaya De** what makes her tick in an extremely niche field



**R**achana Mukherjee is about to usher in a revolution in Kolkata's urban transportation system. The director of Calcutta-based company Conveyor and Ropeway Services has just launched along with the West Bengal urban development

minister, Firhad Hakim, a prototype of a nonlinear ropeway system in Joka. If all goes well, Kolkata, according to Rachana, will soon be the first city in the world to get a curved ropeway network as an eco-friendly alternative aerial transportation solution.

"Normally, you will find ropeways >





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in tourist or religious places and they are always linear,” says Rachana, who single-handedly manages her family business of building ropeways around the world. “But my father, Sekhar Chakraborty, has invented a curved ropeway system that can zigzag through a city! He has also got an international patent for the product.”

Rachana’s company is in talks with the West Bengal government to launch the service in two sectors—the busy Sealdah-BBD Bag stretch covering 3 km and the 4.2 km Howrah-Nabanna strip. In Joka, they demonstrated how the system will run.

The need for an overhead, fuel-saving transportation system cannot be overemphasised. Rachana says that vehicular traffic is increasing by leaps

and bounds in every Indian city, but road space is not being expanded to accommodate an exponential rise in the number of vehicles on Indian roads. “In Kolkata, the problem is acute because the road space is hardly six per cent of the total city area,” she says.

“Hence, it’s imperative that we think of an alternative that can help us avoid congestion—and what better way to do it than installing a ropeway!” As per the proposal with the government, Curvo, as the name goes, will run on electricity, cutting down on the emission of pollutants. It is reasonably noiseless. It can travel at an average speed of 12.5 km per hour, irrespective of route alignment, thereby cutting down on commuting time considerably. Cabins, each with a capacity of 8-10 seats, will

be running at a very short interval from each other. Curvo will provide boarding-deboarding facility every 750 metres. The stations will have elevators. Rachana says that unlike metro railways and flyovers, ropeways can be built in a city in a couple of years as the overhead installation process is hardly an obstruction for ground traffic.

Rachana took over the reins of the company as a director in 1999. Prior to that, she did a stint with Citibank and Hutchison Telecom in Mumbai. Right from her childhood, she thought of nothing but managing their family enterprise. “I have always seen my father designing ropeways and since the time I was in standards IX-X, I was helping him with accounting,” recalls Rachana, who studied in Kolkata’s St Thomas’s School for Girls. She was proud of the fact that they were one of the very few ropeway companies operating not only in India, but also in the world. “The USP of our company is that we are constantly innovating,” says Rachana. Her company has built ropeways in Jaipur, Vishakhapatnam, Darjeeling and Bhopal. She is building a ropeway in Bangladesh’s Chittagong. Besides, they have designed a ropeway system for a revolving restaurant in Alaska.

Rachana is known as the “problem-solver” in her company. “Just like a woman is expected to settle disputes in a family!” she says. “Earlier it was a male-dominated company, but now I am recruiting more women.” She adds that it’s a challenging job for women as sometimes they have to travel to remote areas and stay in tents for site work. But she believes that there’s nothing that is not possible for a woman.

When she is not building ropeways, Rachana is fighting for social causes. Through an NGO, she has adopted a village near Behala. “We are giving them solar lamps as there is no electricity in the area,” says Rachana. “Besides, we are giving girls cycles so that they can commute to schools.” Clearly, Rachana has her feet firmly on the ground. **E**