Logistic difficulties in construction of New Maitri Station

The Government of India decided to construct a new Antarctic Station in 2003-04 and a committee was chosen to select the place. The committee undertook reconnaissance of the coastal area between India Bay and Davis station in the eastern Antarctica. It carried on detail survey of nearly 200 sq. km area in Westford Hills and Larsemann Hills area zeroing on an Grovnes promontory for various logistic reasons. Four expeditions were launched to this site from 2005 to 2009 to collect the base line data for preparing a CEE (environmental) report for seeking clearance from ATCM. As the expedition vessel could reach within 100 m of the station, unloading and transportation of construction material to site could be completed simultaneously. There were a few nervy situations while transporting heavy machinery (~50 Tons) over fast ice, which were accomplished taking due safety measures. The construction was completed in two summer expeditions of 2010-11 and 2011-12.

However, as compared to this, construction of new station at Maitri is going to be more challenging for logistic reasons. Schirmarchar Oasis of central Dronning Maud Land is separated by a vast ice shelf of ~100 km from the ship’s berthing point and all the heavy material need to be transported over land to the new construction site. Over the years, the ice shelf has started breaking up and new crevasses have come up on the convoy route. The convoys can be undertaken between mid March till mid June and later in November till mid December. July - October months are too cold to operate vehicles. January - March is the warmer period resulting in a number of water channels opening up on the convoy route, making it unsafe for operating convoys. Transportation of material and site preparation will be time consuming and may take a couple of seasons before starting actual construction.