

Infrastructure: Key for Development of the North-East

Anand Kumar



The North-Eastern Region has huge untapped potential by way of land mass, mineral and other resources, services sector and human power which is waiting for being exploited for the economic development of the region and the country. To make that happen, the need of the hour is to have a futuristic unified infrastructure development plans with appropriate inputs on technology, financing, capacity development; clearly identifying short term, mid-term and long term goals

Sure, infrastructure development can be the key for the development of the North Eastern Region of the country as it would unlock the potential of its land, minerals, other resources and human power. Infrastructure development by creating employment for skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled becomes an instrument for inclusive development and mainstreaming of remote, backward & neglected areas.

Development of infrastructure in the North Eastern Region is not easy. Significant challenges need to be met, leave aside for fast pacing, but even for building infrastructure at normal pace.

The successive Governments, both at the Union and the level of States, have made efforts in the past through various initiatives for speeding up the construction of infrastructure in the Region. Last year, on 18 July 2014, the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways, Government of India, incorporated the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd. with the objective to fast pace construction of National Highways and other infrastructure in the North Eastern States. This step also aimed at economically consolidating the North Eastern Region with over all benefits flowing to the local population. The enhanced road

connectivity achieved through this initiative would promote cross border trade and commerce besides helping safeguard India's international borders is the hope.

The North Eastern Region supports wide variation in geological features. In this area, the type of soil ranges from hard rock to extremely loose. At one end of the spectrum while cutting the hard rock is a challenge, on the other is stabilising the soil. The geological challenge gets compounded by the limited availability of aggregate, critical for construction of roads and other infrastructure. Security always remains a matter of concern for the infrastructure companies that work in the area.

The North Eastern Region being remote with short supply of construction material, semi and skilled human power and other resources acting as limiting factors; must adopt a unified approach for development of infrastructure to mitigate the challenges. It ought to be examined before planning for infrastructure development if requirements of any two or more sectors can be combined. Rail cum road bridges or tunnels for both road and rail traffic or utility corridors along the roads to facilitate laying of optical fibre, communication, electricity cables at a later date are good examples of unified approach. Development of Tourism and Industrial Parks or other Service Sector facilities

The author is the founder Managing Director of National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation (NHIDCL). He belongs to 1984 batch of Indian Administrative Service and has held many important positions at State and Centre in Finance, Infrastructure, Industry, Tourism, Elections and Governance sectors. He was part of the team which launched 'God's Own Country' campaign and planned introduction of House Boats in Kerala. He was instrumental in drafting the first Port Privatisation Policy in India.

along the National Highways can make the whole exercise very purposeful.

If infrastructure requirements of various sectors like Civil Aviation, Communications, Industry, Power, Transport, Tourism etc. are mapped together and planned for development with futuristic perspective of thirty to forty years following a unified approach the economic, environmental and social costs can be reduced to a large extent and pace of infrastructure development enhanced significantly.

While working on unified and futuristic approach, it is essential that due attention is paid to the quality and durability of infrastructure that is being developed in the Region. Pilferage has been often cited as one major reason for the development of poor quality infrastructure in the North East. While implementing various infrastructure projects a strict regime for quality control is required to be followed for ensuring long durability of infrastructure highways & Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd. (NHIDCL) was incorporated on 1st July, 2014 with authorised capital of Rs. 100 crores and paid up capital of Rs. 5 lakhs became functional on 22nd September, 2014 with first appointment taken place.

The futuristic plans for the development of infrastructure should be made on the basis of social necessity or economy viability. The objectives for infrastructure development should be well defined and well argued. The investment made in infrastructure development should be purposeful.

While doing infrastructure planning for the North Eastern Region, use of new but appropriate technologies is must. It is needless to emphasise that new technologies can enhance durability and efficiency, reduce economic, social and environmental costs and address safety concerns effectively. The effort should also be made to indigenise the useful technologies and also manufacture equipments and materials that are used in infrastructure development. The new technologies can be used

for soil stabilisation, slop protection, quick launch bridges and construction of tunnels. While introducing new technologies for soil stabilisation, care should be taken that the chemicals used are not toxic and leachable.

For working in the North-Eastern sector, easy finance should be made available to the civil contractors and equipment providers. They should be encouraged to employ local human power linking incentives. The finance should be made available for the purpose of infrastructure development at comparatively soft terms and conditions so that in a scenario where whole country is geared up for infrastructure development, the focus on the North-Eastern Region is not lost. Perhaps creation of a North-Eastern Infrastructure Fund may be an answer. To increase the pool of funds available for development of infrastructure in the North East, while conceiving and implementing various infrastructure projects, the responsible agencies must adopt the right mode of project implementation like EPC, Annuity or Hybrid Annuity considering the viability.

For the inclusive development of North-Eastern Region, the efforts of the Union and State Governments should not only be focussed on development of skilled or semi-skill human power like managers, equipment handlers etc, but on the contrary, a serious attempt should be made to enhance the capacity of the local contractors. This effort should be supplemented with preparing suitable packages for them – for which the local contractors can bid. A small step in this direction will enable these contractors from North East to become major players in infrastructure sector in the years to come. The development of local youth and contractors would certainly pay the way for inclusive development of the Region.

While the planning and other administrative issues are tackled adopting futuristic and unified approach by the Union and the States, it is also expected of various implementing agencies like National Highways and Infrastructure Development

Corporation Ltd. (NHIDCL) working in the Region to follow a professional approach.

NHIDCL though incorporated on 18 July, 2014 actually became functional on 22 September, 2014 with first appointment in the company taking place. The vision of the company, as an important stakeholder in development of the North Eastern Region, is to become an instrument for creation and management of infrastructure of highest standard in the country with focus on North East and the mission is to be a professional company which works in most efficient and transparent manner for maximising benefits to all stakeholders including the community.

The infrastructure managing companies or authorities must follow strategies like the ones identified by NHIDCL, the latest entrant in the field. First, they should use e-Tools like e-Office, e-Tendering, e-Monitoring, e-Access for efficiency & transparency. Second, all such stakeholders must revisit various procedures and processes followed today to enhance the ease in doing infrastructure business. Third, they must engage themselves in continuous capacity building of staff and stakeholders including contractors to keep pace with the latest developments. Such entities, as fourth strategy, should facilitate use of new but appropriate technology in materials, design and works for enhancement in quality, durability, execution speed, cost reduction, safety standards and to address environmental concerns. As fifth strategy, all stakeholders like NHIDCL should create a platform to create scientific and innovative temper by involving Experts and Leading Research Institutions for exchange of ideas and becoming a leader in the industry. The commitment of companies like NHIDCL should remain to provide speedy Dispute Resolution Mechanism to avoid unnecessary litigations as sixth strategy and lastly, they all must hold regular consultations with stakeholders in order to create One Vision One Mission as seventh strategic move.

The companies engaged in the North Eastern Region in infrastructure

Projects awarded by NHIDCL during 2014-2015

S. No.	State	No. of packages/ Stretches	Length in Km.	Cost in Crore (Rs.)
1.	Tripura	2	122	879
2.	Assam	10	282	4,008
3.	Meghalaya	1	62	292
4.	Arunachal Pradesh	5	134	1,379
	Total	18	600	6,446

sector in order to cut costs must work on sharing concept – bringing all critical technical resources and equipments in a common pool. NHIDCL, in order to enhance the pace of infrastructure construction in North East has, within a short period, set up its branch offices in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Nagaland, Tripura, Meghalaya and Mizoram.

As of today, NHIDCL has been entrusted with 108 National Highway projects covering an approx length of 7,400 km. to be executed at a cost of approximately Rs.100,000 crore. During the first year of its inception itself, NHIDCL entered into agreements for the implementation of 18 projects covering approximately 600 km. at a cost of Rs.6,446 crore. The details of these projects are as follows:

During the financial year 2015-16, the company proposes to award projects covering approximately 800 Km. with an estimated cost of Rs. 8,000 crore. During the financial year 2016-17, the company proposes to award projects covering 4,900 km. with an estimated cost of Rs. 50,000 crore.

The infrastructure development is the combined responsibility of the Union and the State Governments. While, the responsibility by enlarge for providing land, clearances like forest and utility shifting remains with the State Government, for major projects like National Highways the cost of the project is met and identification of the agency for implementation of the project is done by the Union Government. Unless, the Union and State Governments work within the

frame of One Vision, One Mission, One Goal the development of infrastructure, in the any area, leave aside North East, cannot be fast paced. All stakeholders will have to come together and work out a time bound plan for infrastructure development in the North East with no excuses for delay. For this effective communication between the State Governments, the Union Government and the community would be a prerequisite.

The North-Eastern Region has huge untapped potential by way of land mass, mineral and other resources, services sector and human power which is waiting for being exploited for the economic development of the region and the country. To make that happen, the need of the hour is to have a futuristic unified infrastructure development plans with appropriate inputs on technology, financing, capacity development; clearly identifying short term, mid-term and long term goals The futuristic and unified approach can be the basis for developing smart cities in North east against a predetermined timeframe. □

(E-mail: aanand9@rediffmail.com)

NORTH EAST DIARY

BENGALURU TO HOST 3-DAY NORTH-EAST FESTIVAL

After having successfully showcased North-east in New Delhi and other important towns in North India, the Northeast Showcasing Campaign will be hosted in South India at Bengaluru from 6th of November this year. This 3-day North-east Festival envisages carrying North-east to different parts of the country. The rest of India needs to be familiarized and acquainted better with rich attributes of North-east as well as the people of North-east need to be exposed to the diversities that enrich India from North to South and from East to West. This Bengaluru event is a step in that direction.

This three day event will include cultural programmes, tourism displays, Business summits, seminar discussions, sports slots and arts & craft shows. Each of the sections to be hosted during the 3-day event will have some illustrious luminaries and celebrities from their respective fields. The participants will not only be from different parts of Northeast but also from different parts of India, so as to facilitate a healthy intermingling of different cultures at Bengaluru which is currently a favourite professional and educational hub for youth from the entire subcontinent. This event will also create a stimulating environment for “Startup India” and entrepreneurship.

GUWAHATI TO GET UNDERGROUND AQUARIUM

In a bid to attract domestic and foreign tourists, Assam Tourism has taken up the project to set up an underground aquarium on the outskirts of the city. Such underground aquariums are a big hit among tourists abroad and this will be the first of its kind in the North-east region. The aquarium project would require a vast area of around 50 bighas. Rs 10 Lakh are being spent on the preliminary survey, identification of land and the feasibility study which are expected to be completed this year. This project is going to be big as per the planning of Tourism department, that will have two museums - one on the State's culture and another on tea. □