



# Ambitious Targets

But some roadblocks remain to be addressed

**Subhash Chand Sethi, Chairman, SPML Infra Limited**

**W**orld over, the hyper urbanisation trend is driving demand for the safe and reliable supply of drinking water and we see the same trend in India as well. Given the primacy of the provision of drinking water as a national objective and recent developments in the sector in terms of policy changes and several new schemes giving an impetus to private sector participation, substantial progress has been noticed in the past three years under the new regime. The Indian government has taken several initiatives to improve the country's water infrastructure and distribution system along with providing better sanitation services.

With a renewed focus on the sector and the government's serious approach, several key water supply and sewage treatment projects were completed in the past one year. There has also been a surge in the number of projects planned by the concerned ministries and civic agencies for execution in the near future. The adoption of technology solutions by urban local

bodies (ULBs) to enhance service delivery has also been on the rise. Further, the government has introduced a bill for the setting up of a single standing tribunal to resolve water-related disputes between states. The bill will streamline the adjudication of interstate water disputes and make the present legal and institutional architecture robust. It also proposes the introduction of a mechanism to resolve disputes amicably through negotiations, through a dispute resolution committee to be established by the centre, consisting of relevant experts, before such disputes are referred to the tribunal.

Further, the centre approved the creation of the National Council for River Ganga (Rejuvenation, Protection and Management) to replace the National Ganga River Basin Authority as the overseeing body for Ganga rejuvenation. The centre has also recommended the setting up of a national water commission which will subsume the existing Central Water Commission and the Central Ground Water Board.

Centrally sponsored schemes like the Smart

Cities Mission (SCM), the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT), the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) and the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG), as well as river interlinking and irrigation projects with dedicated fund allocations have moved forward from the initiation and approval stage to execution, with a significant increase in both the number of approved projects and the funds released for their implementation.

Considerable progress has been made under the SCM. A total of 90 cities have been selected so far for development under the mission and have a proposed investment requirement of Rs 1.2 trillion. The selected cities have proposed affordable housing projects that would benefit the urban poor, school and hospital projects, redesigning and redevelopment of roads, public transport systems with last-mile connectivity, citizen-friendly governance, water and sanitation infrastructure along with integrated command and control centres that enable coordination among various agencies for better service



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delivery and effective management of scarce resources like water and power.

AMRUT is one of the key initiatives for improving civic infrastructure in small and big cities. So far, the Ministry of Urban Development has approved Rs 370 billion for 298 mission cities in 21 states, for the entire scheme period up to 2019-20 (out of a total outlay of Rs 500 billion). Under the scheme, investments in water supply to ensure water taps in all urban households along with ensuring the supply of 135 litres per capita per day is the first priority. Laying sewerage and drainage lines is the second thrust area and developing at least one park every year in each of the 500 mission cities is mandatory under AMRUT guidelines. To make this scheme effective, the centre has given states the freedom to plan their expenditure from funds provided under the scheme.

Further, the SBM has seen significant progress with 796 cities across the country being declared open defecation-free. About 3.7 million toilets have been constructed under the mission till July 2017. Door-to-door waste collection activities have also been stepped up, with about 53 per cent of total wards in the country being reported to have 100 per cent door-to-door collection services. Under the mission, the eSBM project, a state-of-the-art information and communications technology (ICT) platform which utilises web, GPS and mobile technology solutions to provide easy and effective real-time monitoring and management of solid waste management with precise GPS mapping of all waste collection points in the city, is also being executed. SPML Infra is executing this project to track and monitor waste transportation in 627 cities in 12 states and the Andaman & Nicobar Islands. Till date, the technology has been developed for two states – Odisha and Jharkhand – where ICT devices have been installed in more than 550

waste transportation vehicles in 32 cities for real-time monitoring of waste transportation vehicles and bin cleaning. Currently, the project is being implemented in Bihar where 300 vehicles in two cities are being covered.

The central government's Namami Gange programme for improving sewerage infrastructure in the country has also made considerable progress. Till July 2017, 155 projects have been sanctioned. Of these, 39 projects have been completed so far. Sewage treatment capacity in towns along the river is being enhanced with a considerable focus on large cities along the Ganga including Haridwar, Kanpur, Allahabad, Varanasi, Patna, Bhagalpur, Howrah and Kolkata. Due to intensive monitoring and inspection of grossly polluting industries in these cities, sewage and effluent treatment facilities have been enhanced, leading to considerable improvement in the water quality of some of the tributaries of the river.

ULBs across the country are actively taking up water supply and sanitation projects. During the past one year, Delhi, Ahmedabad and Siddipet have implemented pilot projects for 24x7 water supply. Further, 24x7 water supply projects for Rajkot and Pimpri-Chinchwad were also approved. At least 320 million litres per day (mld) of sewage treatment capacity was developed over the past year. Meanwhile, at least 420 mld of sewage treatment capacity and 403 mld of water treatment capacity is under different stages of development across the country. Besides, at least 1,275 mld of sewage treatment and 300 mld of water treatment capacity will be developed in the next three-four years. Civic agencies are also planning 24x7 water supply projects for the cities of Kochi, Kozhikode, Thiruvananthapuram, Karimnagar, Hubballi-Dharwad and Davangere.

Per capita waste generation is increasing by 1.3 per cent per annum in India. With the

rapid increase in urban population, the annual increase of waste generated is around 5 per cent. However, not much development has been seen in this segment over the past three years except for some waste treatment plants that have been set up in Mumbai and Delhi (at Bhalswa and Narela-Bawana). Waste processing plants are also planned for Sulthan Bathery in Kerala, Jamnagar in Gujarat, and Bhandwari in Haryana.

The pace of technology adoption has also improved. Water utilities are deploying advanced technologies and solutions like supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA) systems, digital mapping, leakage detection and mobile governance to improve service delivery. In the water and wastewater treatment segment too, new technologies are being adopted. Further, ULBs are also using IT systems and solutions for various aspects of waste management, including collection, transportation, treatment, disposal, asset mapping, network management and customer service. SPML Infra has implemented a number of SCADA systems in its different water supply projects in Rajasthan for effective monitoring and control. Civic agencies in cities such as Bengaluru, Kannur and Delhi have launched mobile applications to address customer grievances regarding their services.

### Sector outlook

The water and waste sector continues to receive a significant push from the centre in the form of new programmes, policies and reforms. Overall, a number of big-ticket water and waste projects have been launched by the government. Going forward, project award could lose momentum unless issues such as the lack of credible data systems, poor financial health of ULBs, the lack of political support, and the involvement of multiple agencies are addressed in a time-bound manner. ■