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Vibrancy of infra sectors will continue: Montek

December 2011

"Which is the most progressive state in infrastructure?" "Where are the problem areas?" "Is desalination feasible in states where power is a problem?" "What do you think will happen?"

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Not quiz questions at an infrastructure college: these are some of the points that Curious George, **Chief Guest Montek Singh Ahluwalia**, sought to know from a handful of practitioners, experts and mediapersons over dinner at the **4th KPMG-Infrastructure Today Awards 2011**, held at The Oberoi, New Delhi, on a cool and foggy Delhi evening. Befitting a topnotch planner, Planning Commission's Deputy Chairman Ahluwalia's childlike quest to understand every nuance, every how, why and what-if remained alight through the three-hour-long evening as he asked questions that included "How was your project achieved? What do you think went right? How did you achieve financial closure?" etc, while giving away an impressive-looking trophy and a certificate to each of the 13 award-winners.

What better way to obtain a pulse of the industry, a sense of independent insights and opinions from the leaders of a few of the most elite members of the infrastructure sectors? Such insight-seeking exercise was perhaps especially needed in an environment that hasn't exactly been inspirational over the past few months for the industry.

The awards were given away to PPP projects in Transport, Urban Infrastructure, Enabling Central and State Agencies and Financiers. The PPP Project of the Year and Special Award were highlights, too: The Aurangabad Water Supply project won the former, while Power Finance Corporation (PFC) was honoured for 25 years of fruitful presence.

The glittering, by-invitation-only ceremony was attended by 250 senior infrastructure practitioners, consultants, financiers and policymakers.

Excerpts from Ahluwalia's speech at the Awards:

"Competitive bidding justifies the decisions taken in PPP. I would like to compliment the NHAI, for example, for the quality of bids they have received this year. Beyond the central projects, I am pleased that the state governments, too, have started adopting the PPP mode of delivery. Ten years ago, I wouldn't have been able to fill a room with investors in our infrastructure. Today's gathering, on the other hand, represents the growth of public-private partnerships (PPP) has achieved over the decade. So I'd like to compliment Infrastructure Today and KPMG for instituting these awards in the important area of PPP."

"The government won't be able to meet the huge needs of infrastructure alone, and PPPs are needed more than ever. We have done reasonably well—not as well as we would've liked to in the 11th Plan, but the increase in PPP is quite impressive as we enter the 12th Plan

period from April next year. I believe the vibrancy of the infrastructure sector will continue. We're in transition between a completely government-owned infrastructure to a situation where we seek half of the sector to be owned by the private sector. We have to recognise the transition bottlenecks. It is much easier to deal with the public sector than with the private: The government's objective of a sort of a 'rob Peter to pay Paul' is at work, and nobody minds very much. But with the private sector in partnership, there is an enormous need for much due diligence because it is as easy to explain away. Are the PPPs are gaining public focus on whether those projects are observing the terms and conditions under which they are brought in. Indeed, the Planning Commission emphasises that a lot of work is needed to be done in advance to get the terms and conditions right."

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Tags: Infrastructure, Montek Singh Ahluwalia, 4th KPMG-Infrastructure Today Awards 2011, New Delhi, Planning Commission, PPP, Aurangabad Water Supply Project, Power Finance Corporation, NHAI, 12Th Plan

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