



Water infrastructure to propel growth in North-east.

SUBHASH SETHI
Chairman, SPML Infra

How is North-east region evolving in infrastructure development? What are the key water infra developments in the region?

India is at the cusp of a growth cycle and statistics reveal that construction and infrastructure development sectors are expected to propel the country to become the third-largest construction market in the world this year, 2022. The government has given a massive push to the infrastructure sector by allocating Rs 10 lakh crore (\$130.57 billion) in the Union Budget 2022-23, to enhance the infrastructure sector in order to track towards the ambitious target of Rs 5 trillion economy. It also expanded the National Infrastructure Pipeline to 9,335 projects which also include projects dedicated in north-eastern region. With strategic planning, India has been speeding up infrastructure projects in North-east with dedicated schemes and special fund allocation as well as securing bi-lateral funding.

Japan has historically been connected to North-east India for a long time and it has become a major part of Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Vision. Japan is funding major infrastructure development projects in different sectors including water, power and urban infra in North-east India. It has invested around \$2 billion in improving infrastructure in the North-eastern region and involved in the Guwahati Water Supply Project and Guwahati Sewage Project (Assam), Umiam-Umtru Stage III Hydroelectric Power Station (Meghalaya), Project on Capacity Enhancement for Sustainable Agriculture and Irrigation Development (Mizoram) among others.

Union Ministries allocate 10% of their budgets for the North-east region and in 2022-23, Rs 76,040 crore has been allocated, which is 11% higher than the revised estimate of 2021-22 (Rs 68,440 crore). The Jal Jeevan Mission

(JJM) is the largest water supply project being implemented in all eight states in the region. As on April 2022, the North-eastern states have the following funds available with them under Jal Jeevan Mission to undertake urban and rural water supply schemes:

States	Funds available under JJM (in Rs cr)
Arunachal Pradesh	445.84
Assam	1,812.20
Manipur	142.03
Meghalaya	408.69
Mizoram	80.08
Nagaland	17.00
Sikkim	111.01
Tripura	140.36

Apart from JJM, there are 12 cities from North-eastern states features amongst the selected 500 cities under the AMRUT scheme that will receive 90% central funding for all projects.

What are your major activities in North-East region? Which are your key projects in the region?

SPML Infra is executing a number of water supply projects under Jal Jeevan Mission in Manipur where it has earlier completed similar projects. As part of the Jal Jeevan Mission, SPML Infra has completed a drinking water supply project in Manipur to provide tap drinking water facilities to around 300,000 populations in 73,014 households in Churachandpur City in a record time of 18 months as against the project duration of 24 months, despite being a challenging task due to hilly and forest area with high intensity of rainfall. SPML is also executing a

World Bank funded project under North-Eastern Region Power System Improvement scheme to erect 16 power substations in different parts of Tripura. We have executed a number of water supply and sanitation projects earlier in Assam, Mizoram, Manipur, and Tripura as well. Currently, all projects under the Jal Jeevan Mission is our key projects not only in North-east region, but in other states as well as we are following up the mission of 'Water for All' initiated by our Hon'ble Prime Minister under the flagship program Jal Jeevan Mission that envisage to provide safe and adequate drinking water through individual functional household tap connections to all households in the country by the year 2024.

How is the landscape a challenging factor in infrastructure development in the region? What kind of technologies and methods are needed to address these challenges?

The geographical and logistical challenges in the North-eastern states are quite different from the rest of India. It is a geo-politically sensitive region due to proximity of international boundaries as it shares 98% of its territory with China, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Myanmar, and only 2% with other states of India. Then there are existing territorial conflicts within the region between the states based on historical border disputes and differing ethnic, tribal or cultural affinities.

The region is not a homogenous category. Each state has its distinct history, varied ethnic communities, structural inequality and power relation dynamics. North-east India is lacking in infrastructural development index compared to other parts of the country even though it fares well in the human development index.

Infrastructure development is disproportionately distributed as urban centres like Imphal, Guwahati, Itanagar and Shillong are fairly developed in contrast to rural and tribal areas. Infrastructure development occupies a special place in India's development discourse and Union Government along with state governments are making focused efforts in creating roads, water supply, pipelines, sewer networks, wastewater treatment facilities, power substation, grids and other urban infrastructure including human and social development projects. Recently, India's first solar-based Integrated Multi-Village Water Supply Project (IMVWSP) was dedicated to the people of Arunachal Pradesh.

The infrastructure development projects not only in North-east but in the entire country need to recognise the importance of technology and how non-digitisation is affecting every part of



the system. There should be a good integration of digital technologies including Internet of Things (IoT), Cloud Computing, BIM, 3D Printing, Drone Monitoring and Robotics in project planning and on-ground execution. It needs automation with connected devices from reporting, document sharing, construction management, auto-archiving, data collection, integrated response trackers, mobile devices with automated alerts and notifications, online and virtual meeting and GPS tracking. These advances can help increase real-time communication and collaboration among stakeholders, decreasing downtime and errors. With the challenging landscape, the project implementing agencies are increasingly being expected to deliver high quality infrastructure development on time to provide world-class solutions for the requirement. Digitisation plays an important role to improve productivity.

What are the opportunities you looking at in the North-east region?

We firmly believe that use of digital technologies help in productivity growth with ease of operations and maintenance. SPML Infra has recognised the importance of digital technologies and automation system and has implemented a number of initiatives for quick decision making and ease of doing business. The company is prepared with innovative approach to receive and execute big ticket water supply and sanitation projects with focus on creating sustainable solutions for the region. We will be happy to receive more projects under the Jal Jeevan Mission, AMRUT 2.0 and other dedicated water supply schemes in all eight states to make formidable contributions in the way water supply infrastructure is created and managed. In essence, our plan for the region is to maximise our strength to be able to accomplish through the difficult situations and achieve the developmental targets of the region.

SPML Infra is executing a number of water supply projects under Jal Jeevan Mission in Manipur where it has earlier completed similar projects.
