

‘Salience of New Pragati Maidan’

Background

Pragati Maidan in New Delhi is a premier landmark exhibition complex. True to its name, Pragati Maidan stands for progress through promotion of trade and commerce. The exhibition ground was developed to enable hosting of the Railway Exhibition in 1952 to mark the centenary of Railways in India. However, the sprawling complex took its shape and expanded with the hosting of Asia 1972 – the third Asian International Trade Fair - coinciding with India’s Silver Jubilee Year of Independence and it was then that the fair ground was rechristened as ‘Pragati Maidan’.

Exhibition and Convention Industry

Exhibition and Convention industry worldwide has been a huge force multiplier in a nation’s economy. Exhibitions/fairs play a vital role to enhance exports and thereby help accelerate the country’s economic growth. Recent studies on the exhibition industry have revealed that Asia and India in particular will be at the centre-stage of the future growth of global exhibition and convention industry. India can realize this potential if she has excellent exhibition and convention infrastructure of international standards coupled with a major campaign entitled ‘Meet in India’ to be launched on the lines of ‘Make in India’ initiative.

Need for modern infrastructure

The Central Govt. recognized in 2014-15, perhaps for the first time, the need for world class infrastructure for exhibition and convention facilities particularly in the NCR region. The Hon’ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi directed in December, 2015 that the long overdue redevelopment of Pragati Maidan and a green field project at Dwarka in Delhi should be taken up and executed in a fast track mode.

Given that the infrastructure at Pragati Maidan had become old and dilapidated and a large area occupied by State Govts. and Central Govt. Ministries/Departments in the form of pavilions remaining unutilized except during the 14 day window of India International Trade Fair (IITF), it was decided to redevelop Pragati Maidan into a world class state-of-the-art iconic International Exhibition-cum-Convention Centre(IECC). The plan also included a provision for hospitality, it being an integral component of any modern Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE) destination/hub worldwide. The Competent Authority has now approved monetization of 3.70 acres of land at Pragati Maidan for construction and running of a star hotel by a third party. It took me a lot of effort and tenacity to obtain this approval.

IECC

The IECC project is to be implemented in two phases (2nd phase will be taken up a few years later). The first phase involves setting up of an iconic world class convention centre of 53000 sq. mtrs. with an amphitheatre of 3000 PAX and aggregate capacity of 11450 pax including 7000 pax capacity in a single format – five times the capacity of Vigyan Bhawan, six modern exhibition Halls with an exhibition area of 1.51 lakh sq. mtrs. along with an open exhibition area of nearly 40,000 sq. mtrs., basement parking of 1.6 lakh sq. mtrs. for 4800 Equivalent Car Units (ECUs) connected with the tunnel, skywalk connectivity with Pragati Maidan Metro station, administrative block of 8857 sq. mtrs and the modern supporting infrastructure. The work on this project is in full swing and on schedule, and is set to be completed by the end of September, 2019.

The Convention centre will be really iconic and entails a 32.4 meter tall structure on a raised platform with elliptical facade and latest modern architecture with inspiration from Parliament House and Rashtrapati Bhawan. There will be a huge plaza in front of the convention centre with more than 20 F&B outlets, a large water body with colourful fountain which will make the place a really landmark spot for the people of Delhi and the country.

I was very keen that this venue should not be redeveloped unless traffic in and around Pragati Maidan is decongested and unhindered and easy access to the complex ensured. In fact, I refused to go ahead with the project unless this is taken up concurrently. Accordingly, comprehensive traffic decongestion interventions at a cost of Rs. 923 crore were formulated by ITPO in consultation with PWD, Govt. of Delhi as integral to the IECC project. These traffic interventions are now under execution fully funded by the Central Govt. and set to be completed by August, 2019. These traffic solutions are aimed at making Mathura Road from W-point to DPS and also Bhairon Marg – Ring Road intersection signal free through six underpasses. More importantly, a six lane divided tunnel is being constructed cutting across Pragati Maidan connecting India Gate to Ring Road through Purana Quila Road/Mathura Road. The tunnel will serve as a much needed alternative link to Bhairon Marg which is getting choked. All of this would relieve the people of Delhi & NCR of growing traffic woes in this area. Moreover, these traffic solutions would significantly curtail the prevalent pollution levels in this area. Thus, the IECC project goes much beyond Pragati Maidan.

Challenges

These brownfield projects were rather complicated and expectedly faced numerous challenges such as vacation of pavilions, demolition of certain structures, considerable litigation, obtaining statutory clearances/approvals in a record time, tying of funding of the aggregate project cost of Rs.3436.91 crore with no specific budgetary support, selection of construction agency at a competitive price, and many more. However, all these challenges were successfully met strictly within the existing rules and regulations with the proactive and impatient approach pursued by ITPO and the leadership provided by the Cabinet Secretary and the highest level in the Government. In fact, the manner of execution of these projects sets a fine example for other projects to emulate.

Symbol of New India

The IECC will be on par with the best in the world in terms of exhibition and convention facility. It will add immensely to the grandeur and iconicity of the capital city of Delhi. The complex will be a unique symbol of 'New India' envisioned by the Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and is in sync with India emerging as a global power. The entire global and Indian exhibition and convention industry is very excited and upbeat about the makeover of Pragati Maidan. Many stakeholders have met me and seen the work at the site with their own eyes. They now feel fully assured that the projects are on track and would be delivered as per the timelines. They are unanimous in their assessment that such a complex at Pragati Maidan will serve as a catalyst in India's growth story and prove to be a game changer to take the global and Indian exhibition and convention industry to the next level. ITPO is fully geared up to deliver the projects as per the stipulated timelines. ITPO is equally focused to craft and implement a marketing plan and strategy to ensure optimal utilization of this valuable national resource being created. I, for one, take immense pride and satisfaction in driving these projects and striving hard to make New Pragati Maidan a reality even before the schedule.

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