

Editor's Note

So we've slain the demons. Now we're ready to welcome the Gods home. But even as we celebrate the triumph of good over evil, we are working towards several designated goals, which were further clarified to us at our second quarterly meeting on October 7. Our friends and mentors made several useful recommendations on future projects. Having tasted success with our first event on surety bonds in collaboration with CII and the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India, we are now energised about our next advocacy event for urban mobility, again in conjunction with CII. More on this in the next issue of our newsletter.



Bhavna Bhatia at meeting

Ideas Aplenty at Quarterly Meeting

TIF's second quarterly meeting was an intense ideas marathon, leaving us with a lot to think about. Attended by many members of our Council of Advisors and several Distinguished Fellows, it was an opportunity for us to refine our goals and plan future projects. Some of the points that emerged were that we should aim to be among the most respected ports of call on anything to do with infrastructure. Thinking should be 40 per cent of the work, and advocacy should be 60 per cent. Many suggestions were made and accepted with alacrity. There was also a most engaging discussion between TIF Distinguished Fellow Jagan Shah and the World Bank's Bhavna Bhatia on two focus areas – energy and urban. Among those who joined us for the discussions were Trustee PK Sinha, members of the Advisory Council Arun Nanda, Sunil Mathur, Ashish Dhawan, DK Sen, Rajnish Kumar, Dilip Cherian, and G Raghuram; as well as Distinguished Fellows Supratim Sarkar, Rajaji Meshram and Shah. The next quarterly meeting is on February 17, 2024. We will report back on that.



Vinayak Chatterjee, Arun Nanda, PK Sinha and Rajnish Kumar; an overview of meeting (below)



On the Ground with Groundwater

One of the projects we are working on is the on-ground analysis of the first ever Water Body Census conducted by the Government. Our COO Nitin Zamre joined a research team that is checking the results of the survey in three villages of Ajmer and Luni in Jodhpur, Rajasthan. The results will enable us to compare the data with the census, identify the issues to engage with, and present our findings to the Government for further action.



Zamre with villagers in Luni, and at the Gram Panchayat office



Event Alert

TIF is working with CII on an urban mobility conference in Delhi. To be held in December, the day-long conference will have a series of experts discussing the appropriate Public Transport system for cities, the financial viability once the choice is made, and the impact of technology. The Delhi event will be followed by another at the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, on building capacity of state-level administrators in making the right call on urban mobility options.

TIF@InTheNews

TIF Founder answered 10 questions about one of the most important announcements emanating from the G20 gathering in Delhi in September. This was before Hamas attacked Israel but one assumes that the India Middle East Europe Corridor will eventually happen. Chatterjee says he expects it to become an economic corridor, stretching from Mumbai to the Chittagong and Colombo ports, taking into account India's proposed International Container Transshipment Port in the Andamans. Recent reports also mention the inclusion of the ports of Kandla, JNPT and Mundra.

Among the benefits is a significant reduction in logistics cost along certain nodes in this route. Second, there is a further blossoming of

trade with countries hitherto relatively unexploited such as Saudi Arabia, the Gulf, and East Europe. Third, the potential to be the chosen builder and operator of the rail portion may enhance India's stature. It also signals India's shift from the earlier India-Iran-Russia International North South Transport Corridor that had Iran's Chabahar Port as a pivot.

The essentials of G20's corridor initiative

Of the many announcements emanating from the G20 gathering in Delhi in September, the one that has evoked widespread curiosity is the IMEE Corridor. Here are 10 popular queries with their answers.

What is the IMEE Corridor?

Well, the full form is the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor. Essentially, it is a transportation link starting in Mumbai from where goods will be sent by ship to Dubai Port. They will then be transported by rail from Dubai Port to Haifa Port in Israel (via Jordan), and then by ship again to the port of Piraeus in Greece. From there, they will travel overland by road or rail to Hamburg in Germany. The project has eight key stakeholders — India, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Italy, France, Germany, the USA and the European Union, all of whom have been signatories to the MoU released during G20. Israel is an enthusiastic "partner."

What kind of Corridor is it?

The answer hinges on whether it is envisaged merely as a logistics corridor, or it is meant to flower into an economic corridor. At this stage, the bet is on the latter, as the former does not quite make the cut. A ship can easily transport a container from Mumbai to Hamburg more cost-effectively. However, it is believed that a new thrust will be given for trade among all the countries the IMEEC passes through, and a "logistics corridor" to start with will ultimately morph into an "economic corridor."

How is it different from a similar Chinese initiative?

The Chinese announced the Belt-and-Road Initiative (BRI) 10 years ago. It drew gasps of wonderment then, as it sought to encompass over 100 countries in its fold across south and Southeast Asia, Central Asia, Eastern Europe, and the African continent. Its string of projects across this vast terrain encompassed ports, roads, airports, and industrial parks. Most importantly, the Chinese held out the promise of cheap, long-term funds for infrastructure development. However, the BRI initiative has faced some criticism recently as many of the beneficiary coun-

tries are realising that they are falling into a debt trap. However, the BRI is still quite robust with a number of projects around the world.

Why does it originate from Mumbai if there is a larger regional play?

It is clear that India, as the emergent third-largest economy is the bulwark of the plan. But it would be desirable for surrounding nations to be involved too as part of sub-continental India. So, the line from Mumbai could well be stretched to Chittagong and Colombo ports, taking into account India's proposed International Container Transshipment Port in the Andamans. Recent reports also mention the inclusion of western-Indian ports of Kandla, JNPT (Near Mumbai) and Mundra. Moreover, with the African Union having been invited into the G20 club, it would be desirable to link this continent too by starting with some east-African ports.

Is it only about the flow of physical goods?

Not necessarily. The initial vision is extended to cover energy flows too. India today buys hydropower from Bhutan and sells thermal power to Bangladesh. A dedicated power-line to Sri Lanka has been discussed. More importantly, the focus on renewables should make a cross-border transmission grid attractive as sunset in Bangladesh could well be offset by bright sunshine in West Asia.

So, what is the benefit to India?

First, a significant reduction in logistics cost along certain nodes in this route. Second, a further blossoming of trade with countries hitherto relatively unexploited, such as Saudi Arabia, the Gulf, and East Europe, and possibly with other countries that branch off from the main route. Third, the potential to be the chosen builder and operator of the rail portion may enhance India's stature. Fourth, it signals India's shift from the earlier India-Iran-Russia INSTC (International North South Transport Corridor) that had Iran's Chabahar Port as a pivot. Fifth, it is seen as cementing relations between India and Arab nations. Are there any softer issues to watch out for? Yes, and they are largely to do with easing bureau-

cratic impediments along the route. A container from Mumbai to Hamburg will have to be loaded and unloaded at six stations. That is a high degree of handling for any version of multi-modalism. Then, there are the usual border checks for illegal movements across 15 participating nations within the IMEEC. So, it is of critical importance to have a "single-pass" mechanism for total system effectiveness.

Was not this the Spice Route centuries ago?

Yes. As distinct from the Silk Route (overland through Central Asia), this alignment is indeed almost equivalent to the Spice Route of centuries ago, when imperial Rome bought spices and jewelry from the splendour that was India.

How will it be funded?

As things stand, IMEEC is a combination of operating ports and a new rail line across the Arabian peninsula. It is only this rail link that has to be built. The distance between Dubai and Haifa Port is about 2,600 kms. Assuming it would cost ₹30 crore/km to build a high-quality line, the total would be ₹78,000 crore. Given that Japan alone was able to provide ₹1 trillion of concessional finance for India's Bullet Train project, this amount is easily fundable by the well-heeled partners. In its final form, the IMEEC is expected to require a capital outlay of around \$20 billion with port-capacity expansions, new freight stations, optical fibre networks, electricity grids and pipelines.

So, is the IMEEC a geopolitical move?

Certainly so. It seeks to send a powerful message that a swathe of well-meaning and friendly countries have joined hands to impact transport, trade and economic development in a model quite different from a dominant single-country initiative. Italy, for instance, has decided to pull out of BRI. Moreover, it is seen as a diplomatic victory for India in many ways, as the IMEEC bypasses both Pakistan and Turkey. Specifically, it opens up a viable access unavailable hitherto with the blocked land route through Pakistan.

Thus, from trade to diplomacy, there is much to commend in this initiative.

The writer is an infrastructure expert. He is also the founder and managing trustee of The Infravision Foundation



INFRATALK
VINAYAK CHATTERJEE

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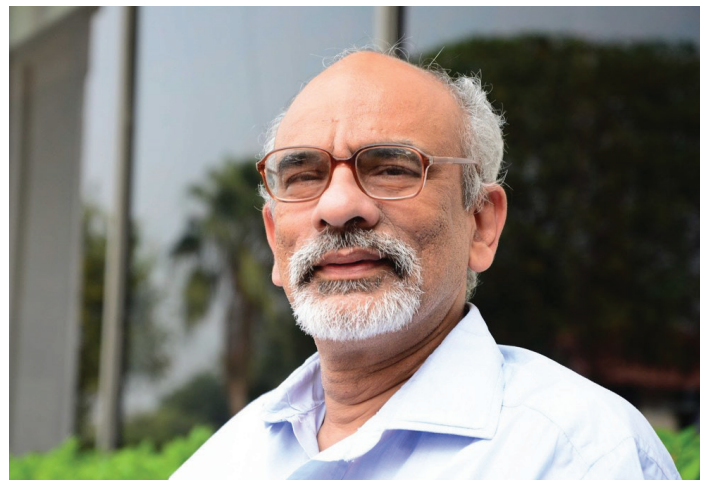
Former Director, IIM, Bangalore, and Member, Council of Advisors, TIF, G. Raghuram, has been writing at length on infrastructure developments in shipping and railways. In the latest issue of Yojana, he delivers a masterclass on the status of roads in India, while also highlighting the challenges: of road safety; of the state of urban roads; of measuring lane kilometres versus road kilometres, to capture not only access but also capacity; of origin to destination (OD) data for future planning; and of better coordination with PPP players. He also wrote about the challenges before Indian Railways and on the Galathea Bay Transshipment Port.

For more on the latter, read this:

<https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/opinion/india-needs-to-view-the-maritime-canvas-holistically-11571191.html>

<https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/opinion/proposed-galathea-bay-container-transshipment-port-likely-to-struggle-for-traffic-11448891.html>

<https://indianinfrastructure.com/2023/08/22/growth-track-changes-and-challenges-for-indian-railways/>



NaBFID News

We are engaging with the National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NaBFID) on possible collaborations. Our research paper on S-I Ratings has suggested that a Sustainable Infra Development Cell (SIDC) be created to assess individual projects for sustainability under the aegis of NaBFID.

Infrastructure@OTT

Every big city on earth is built on the graveyard of a jungle, says the big, bad CEO of the big, bad multinational corporation who has been deprived of his moment of triumph by the original inhabitants of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. His founder would have landed in a helipad in the middle of an environmental buffer zone in the jungle, cleared of the Orakas, members of a tribe who call the islands their own. The question is as a Swaraj Mahotsav takes place on the island, and thousands of tourists descend on Port Blair, will the Orakas survive?

More important, there is a deadly virus that is being borne through the water for which the cure is with the Orakas. It is a battle where only the fittest will survive, says the lieutenant governor of the territory (played brilliantly by the director Ashutosh Gowariker). He is quite sure who the fittest are. But should he be so sure? As the Orakas gather to consult, they are clear: First they came for our trees, they say. Then they came for our land. Then our bodies. What should they do now? "Then we fight," they say. And how, leaving one to wonder how development is measured. There are multiple strands in the story of Netflix's new series Kaala Paani--a doctor who looks for the simplest explanation (Mona Singh, extraordinary again), a police officer looking for a posting to the mainland (Amey Wagh), two young lovers, and an island native who is out to make a quick buck. Set in the post-pandemic world of 2027, no doubt to avoid comparisons to what is happening in the islands currently, the series is a mix of high corporate intrigue, climate change, and the hazards of upsetting the balance of nature. Nature always wins, says the series, even when it is pitched against the forces of modern development. Shot in Port Blair with a cast and crew of 350, the series has been greenlit for a second season.



Test Your Infra Power

1. Mani Ratnam's Ponnyin Selvan, adapted from Kalki's novel, is based on which river?
2. Who was the first woman sarpanch in India with an MBA degree?
3. Which is the longest railway platform in India?
4. Where is India's first solar powered village?
5. Which is the fastest metro service in India?



Answers: 1. The river Kaveri. Ponnyin Selvan or the Son of Kaveri was the name given to Rajaraja I, the mighty Chola emperor. He was said to have been saved by Mother Kaveri herself from drowning in the river when he was five. 2. Chhavi Rajawat from village Soda, Rajasthan. 3. Sri Siddhagrodha railway station in Hubballi, Karnataka, at 1.5 km. 4. Modhera in Gujarat. 5. The Delhi-Meerut Rapid Transit System (RTS), will be the fastest Metro service in the country. The authorities recently conducted a high-speed run on the stretch and the Alstom-made trains attained a maximum speed of 160 kmph.



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