

UTTARAKHAND TO CAPITALISE ON INHERENT STRENGTHS WHILE DEVELOPING INFRA

Summit in Dehradun by PHDCCI and ASAPP Media discusses ways to overcome current constraints

Dehradun.



A one day summit was held on 13 June in Dehradun focusing on infrastructure opportunities in Uttarakhand, and how private participation in the state's infrastructure projects. Titled "Infrastructure for Inclusive Growth", the summit discussed how building sustainable infrastructure can enable social development especially in the far flung areas of the 'hill-plain' state. Uttarakhand has two contrasting geographic features—the southern, more industrial plains, and the hilly districts whose development has often suffered due to migration and lack of physical and social infrastructure that could lead to sustainable employment and development of traditional industries such as tourism.

Speakers compared the state to Switzerland in terms of topography and potential, and said solutions in connectivity—such as a combination of rail and ropeway—are available and workable. Punit Agrawal, AGM, Dedicated Freight Corridor Corporation of India said about 800 km of rail lines could potentially be explored in Uttarakhand.



Rajan Malhotra, Regional Head, L&T, said, "Our experience in Uttarakhand has been bad, in part due to delays in decision making. For example, some financial bids have not been opened for two years." Sumit Barua, PPP Expert (ADB), Uttarakhand Public Private Partnership Cell, countered that perception by describing the 86 projects in the pipeline under PPP in the state, worth Rs 5,182 crore.

Similarly, road infrastructure, which is adequate in the state for current requirements but lacking for any growth, formed a focus area of discussion. While the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) has built roads in the state, the question, as Dr SP Singh, ex-Vice Chancellor, HNB Garhwal University and Member of the State's Planning Commission, said: "Roads are important but must include health and safety as two critical elements for development. In any current plans, vendors, hawkers, cyclists and pedestrians are conspicuously missing."

As we head towards an era of carbon reduction, Singh said, carbon concentration in our hill stations has increased, clearly calling for sustainable and integrated solutions. The question, he said, is how to get investors and the government interested in such projects.



Some basic assumptions in infrastructure requirements were questioned, as State Planning Commission Advisor Virendra Uniyal wondered whether Uttarakhand really needs superior roads, leading to benefit contractors. He pointed out that large-scale migration from the hills has become a major problem for the state, and suggested that social infrastructure such as health and education in those areas is a much more pressing need for equitable and inclusive growth. “We have not had a good experience when we made infrastructure into a commercial activity.” He urged PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PHDCCI) to develop a sustainable model for tourism in the state.

The summit noted that Uttarakhand’s main focus will remain harnessing the existing strengths of the state, and that infrastructure will be built to support those activities—such as Ayurveda and tourism. As expected, tourism has attracted the maximum projects, 23 of them, worth Rs 1,837 crore, while energy followed with 15 worth Rs 899 crore and urban development with seven projects of Rs 811 crore. Three integrated solid waste management projects are already bid out.



One of the issues plaguing the entire nation’s infrastructure industries is trained labour and human resources, and *Infrastructure Today’s* Editor-in-Chief and ASAPP Media Information Group’s Managing Director Pratap Vijay Padode underlined that concern. “Uttarakhand is at an inflection point,” he said. “What is needed therefore is inclusive growth through skill development.” Companies such as L&T have attempted a grassroots level training programme, and the company’s Regional Head Malhotra said that in Uttarakhand, too, such efforts are on. PHDCCI’s President Salil Bhandari said the Chamber is working on a model whereby short term training can be funded effectively, and that model, when developed, can be applied to Uttarakhand as well.

Religious tourism seems to be a top item on the government’s agenda, as Chief Minister Dr Ramesh Pokhriyal ‘Nishank’ broadly identified potential points for sustainable tourism. “Religious tourism should also be exploited,” he said, explaining that infrastructure for tourism is already underway. “We already have five airports, and with helipads in the offing, we should attract religious tourists.”



Optimism reigned as speakers pointed out plans for the state to be power-surplus again within five years, after a gap of a decade of being deficit on power supply. ASAPP Media's Padode stressed the importance of hydro electric power as the mainstay for the state. GP Patel, MD and Director (Finance), Uttarakhand Jal Vidyut Nigam Limited, said while the roadmap was clear for his company to traverse hydro and solar projects to make the state power-surplus, he said land acquisition, R&R and funding remained deterrents, apart from more natural causes such as a young, weak-terrain mountain range leading to 'geological surprises'. Disaster management should be a part of tourism infrastructure, Veerendra Kalra, Partner of a CA firm, Nangia & Company, said.



Speakers for the summit were:

Dr Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank', Hon'ble Chief Minister, Government of Uttarakhand

Mr Salil Bhandari, President, PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Mr Pratap Vijay Padode, Editor-in-Chief, Infrastructure Today, and MD, ASAPP Media Information Group

Ms Susmita Shekhar, Deputy Secretary General, PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Mr Virendra Uniyal, Advisor, State Planning Commission, Uttarakhand

Dr S P Singh, Ex. VC, H.N.B. Garhwal University & Member, Planning Commission Govt. of Uttarakhand

Dr Sumant Baukhandi, Founder & Director, GMP Pharma Institute Private Limited

Mr G P Patel, MD and Director (Finance), Uttarakhand Jal Vidyut Nigam Limited

Mr Pankaj Gupta, President, Industries Association of Uttarakhand

Mr Verendra Kalra (CA), Partner, Nangia & CO.

Mr P K Gupta, Chief GM, BSNL

Mr Ashish Wig, Chairman, Infrastructure Committee, PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Mr Indu Kumar Pandey, Chairman, State Finance Commission & Former Chief Secretary, Govt. of Uttarakhand

Mr Sumit Barua, PPP Expert (ADB), Uttarakhand Public Private Partnership Cell

Ms Vandana Agarwal, Director & CEO, Magik Homes Infracon Pvt. Ltd

Mr Rajan Malhotra, Regional Head, L&T

Mr Punit Agrawal, AGM, Dedicated Freight Corridor Corporation of India Ltd.

Mr Vikram S Bajwa, General Manager and Officer-in-Charge, Reserve Bank of India, Dehradun

Mr B D Raturi, Deputy Chairman, Bhagirathi River Valley Development Authority

Mr Aamir Jariwala, Head-Corporate Strategy & IR, SPML

Dr Ranjeet Mehta, Secretary (Infrastructure, Energy, Housing & Urban Development), PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry