

# CONSTRUCTION **TIMES**

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## A MOMENTOUS YEAR!

**INSIDE**

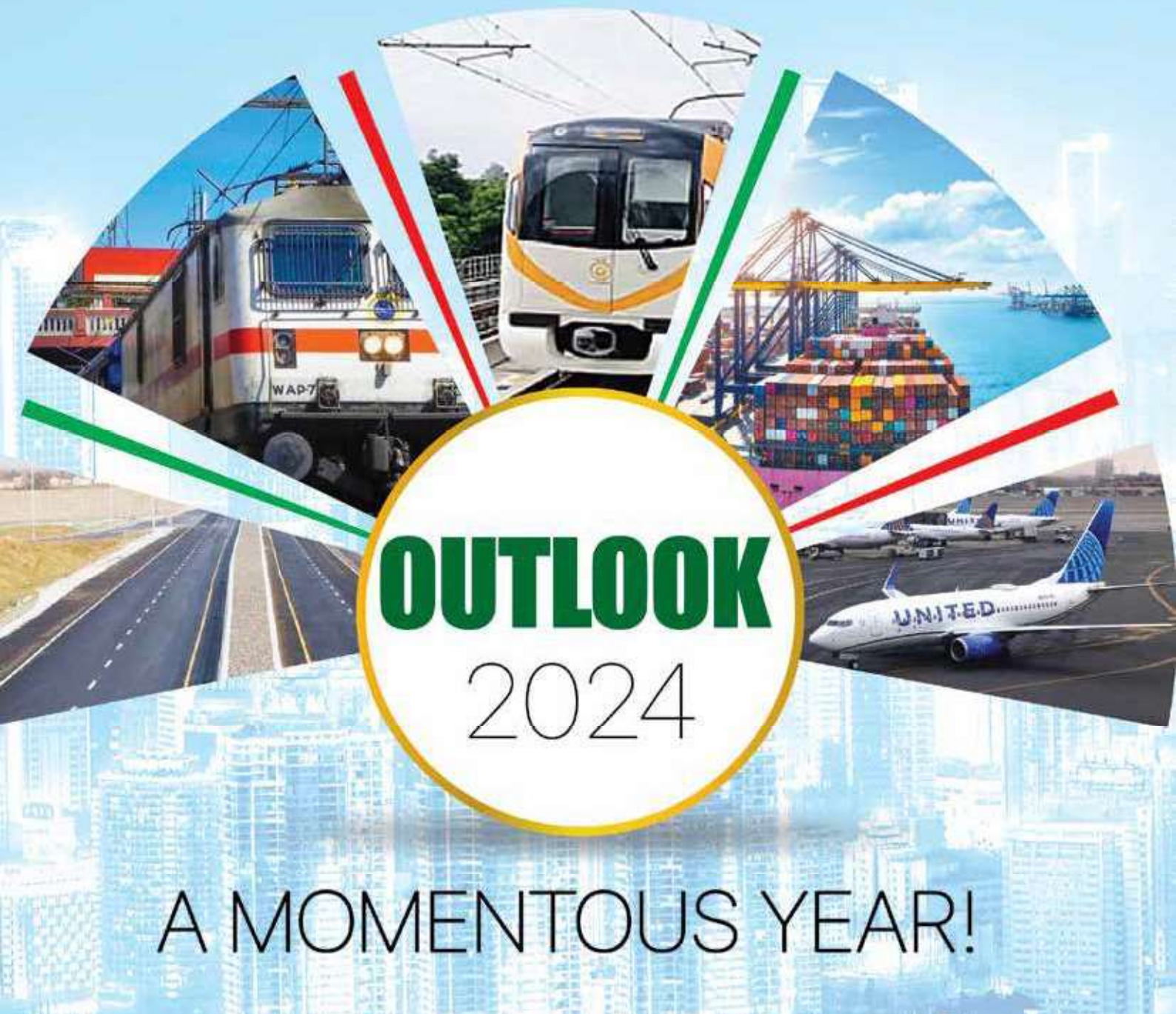
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While the year 2023 saw the country achieving greater heights in infrastructure creation, there is still way to go towards a sustainable infrastructure network in the country. **Construction Times** explores the way forward.

**A**s we are entering another year of opportunities and challenges, India is stepping closer to the goal of becoming the world's third-largest construction market. The growing infrastructure creation and real estate developments has created ample opportunities for construction industry in India to grow leaps and bounds. These trends also come with challenges in terms of aggregates

and construction materials, emissions, waste generation and more. Going ahead we need to address these challenges while we are aiming the bigger market globally in the coming years.

#### **LOOKING BACK**

If the year 2022 was the period of stabilizing the economy after the Covid impact, 2023 has been the year of optimism and positive

growth. The year has seen many achievements as also challenges in certain aspects. India has shown great resilience during the year compared to many major economies of the world, in the volatile global market conditions. The Union Budget 2023 was focusing on infrastructure led development which is beneficial not just for the infrastructure sector but the holistic growth of the economy. A whopping 33 per cent rise in Budget allocation for infrastructure investment capital spending has created an unprecedented opportunity for India's infrastructure growth in 2023 and the journey continues.

Some of the highlights in the roads and highways sector are as follows. According to a year-end review 2023 of Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH), the National Highway (NH) network increased by 60% from 91,287 km in 2014 to 1,46,145 km in year 2023. Length of 4-lanes and above NH increased by 2.5 times – 18,387 km (2014) to 46,179 km (Nov'23). Average pace of NH construction increased by 143% to 28.3 km/day from 2014. Out of 108 (3,700 km) port connectivity road projects, 8 (294 km) are completed, 28 (1,808 km) are awarded and DPR under-progress for 72 (1,595 km) projects.

Some of the key expressways such as the Mumbai-Delhi have seen partial functioning during the year 2023.

The Indian railway sector has seen some significant facelift in infrastructure and services in 2023. In the Union Budget, the railway sector has been allotted Rs 2.40 lakh crore as a capital expenditure. Electrification of rail lines was a major task taken up during the year towards making railways greener. With a vision of providing eco-friendly, faster and energy-efficient mode of transportation, Indian Railways is marching ahead towards 100% electrification of broad-gauge tracks. During the calendar year 2023, Indian Railways has achieved 6,577 route km electrification. Total broad-gauge network of 61,508 route km has been electrified up to December 2023 which is 93.83 % of total broad-gauge route (65,556 RKM) of Indian Railways. On the progress of the freight corridor projects, the construction of Eastern Dedicated Freight Corridor (EDFC) from Ludhiana to Sonnagar (1,337 km) has been completed in December 2023, according to the Railway Ministry. At the same time, 1,176 km out of 1,506 km of Western Dedicated Freight Corridor

(WDFC) from Jawaharlal Nehru Port Terminal (JNPT) to Dadri has been completed. As part of the improved services on Railways, the number of Vande Bharat services has been drastically increased across the country to reach the benefit to more people.

In the airports and aviation sector, the ministry attained several milestones in the year 2023, according to a ministry report. This included 60 new RCS routes commenced in 2023; 154 new RCS routes awarded under UDAN; and 12 new RCS routes commenced in North East. In the maritime sector, India reached 22nd rank in International Shipment category as against 44th rank in 2014. Also, India jumped 6 places to rank 38 in World Bank's Logistics Performance Index 2023.

## LOOKING AHEAD

The year 2024 will see some light at the end of the tunnel with the development activities taken up last year, while certain long gestation period projects like the bullet train project and the Navi Mumbai Airport project will see some major gains this year. At the same time, one of the most awaited one-of-its-kind projects, the Mumbai Trans-Harbour Link (MTHL) that connects Sewri-Nhava Sheva, has been just inaugurated by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This sea-bridge will provide faster connectivity between Mumbai and Navi Mumbai, further improving the connectivity to Pune. Some of the remaining key projects under execution will see major progress this year.

For the industry stakeholders, the year will be the time for gearing up to the next stage of development activities post the general elections. The focus will be on elevating service excellence, leveraging digitalization and deepening customer engagement. As the world stares at the rapid depletion of natural resources and imminent climate changes impacting the ecosystem, there will be a larger focus on environment-friendly approach and sustainable practices in construction activities. The energy sector will see more progress in renewables, underscore India's commitment to a cleaner, more sustainable energy future. Mega infra development programmes such as National Infrastructure Pipeline, Bharatmala project, Gati Shakti Master Plan, amongst others, will continue to progress throughout the year maintaining the momentum of the country's overall infrastructure development. ■



**V VIVEKANAND**, President, Indian Construction Equipment Manufacturers' Association (ICEMA) and Managing Director, Caterpillar India

As India progresses towards a US\$ 5 trillion economy, infrastructure will continue to be the primary driver of economic growth. The Indian CE industry, being one of the key facilitators of infrastructure development in the country, is expected to contribute effectively towards the Government's vision of creating a modern and world-class infrastructure by providing new age and sustainable construction equipment for efficient and time-bound execution of strategic projects, thereby furthering the growth of the nation. Supported by the Government's mega infra development programmes such as National Infrastructure Pipeline, Bharatmala project, Gati Shakti Master Plan, amongst others, the CE industry has shown remarkable progress over the last year, registering an annual growth of 26% in FY23, and the momentum has continued in the current financial year as well, with the industry expected to grow by 15-20% in FY24.



**NIKHIL BOTHRA**, Director, EPACK Prefab



In the wake of climate change, India's steadfast commitment to sustainable infrastructure shines brightly. Initiatives such as 'Make in India' and the Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme have become catalysts, fostering enhanced connectivity and facilitating rapid growth in airports, manufacturing units and warehousing. This has propelled prefabricated structures as the preferred choice in construction. Foreseeing a transformative era, composite structures are poised to revolutionize various industries, permeating multi-story constructions, data centers, and meeting the escalating demands in warehousing. Over the next few years, India will feature among the fastest-growing countries in terms of construction output, making technology intervention a key component. India is expected to become the third-largest construction market in the world by 2025 and register a CAGR of over 13% during next five years. As the industry progresses, it's set to embrace the integration of robotics into AI, aiming to significantly reduce construction time.

**JOHN SLAVEN**, CEO, Vedanta Aluminium

Globally, India ranks among the fastest growing economies today, and could well emerge as one of the top 3 largest economies by 2030. Delivering on this potential will require rapid and sustained infrastructure development. We therefore anticipate a sustained growth trajectory for India's construction sector, led by the government's push for high-quality, reliable infrastructure to meet the growing need, accompanied by an increased interest in sustainable infrastructure and 'green' buildings — all supported by domestically sourced raw materials. As a multi-faceted modern metal, aluminium is already a favourite of the construction sector with its advantaged strength to weight ratio, excellent formability, malleability, ductility, and infinite recyclability. Also, relative to its GDP growth rate, the country's aluminium demand intensity will also be higher than in developed economies, amplifying growth in demand. As the nation's largest producer of top-quality aluminium which enables extraordinary innovations in construction, we at Vedanta Aluminium aim to deliver solutions and materials for India's infrastructure applications, adding to its continued rise.

