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'Innovative' Metro rail to serve Hyderabad from today

HMR is not only the first to be built by a private sector giant but also has many other firsts to its credit, points out its Managing Director N. V. S. Reddy

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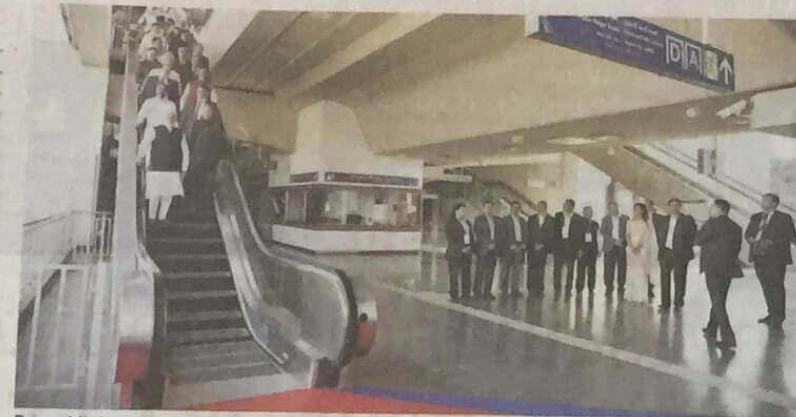
Hyderabad got the first airport built by the private sector, it now has a double unique distinction of being the first city to have metro rail project built by the private sector giant L&T through its subsidiary L&T Metro Rail Hyderabad. All other metro rail projects across the country have been built by the combination of State and Central governments.

This has to be kept in mind before going into the trials and tribulations it has undergone in the last seven years ever since L&TMRH bagged the contract. "It is not just an innovative engineering model but financially too because the then government said its priorities were welfare and agriculture so public, private partnership (PPP) mode was thought of," recalls Hyderabad Metro Rail (HMR) Managing Director N.V.S. Reddy.

PPP model

While metro rail goes 'live' from Wednesday morning, it now appears Hyderabad is the chosen one for the project of its nature.

The special model was worked when "current Chief Secretary S.P. Singh as Municipal Secretary put me onto Planning Commission mem-



Prime Minister Narendra Modi returning after a trip on the maiden run of the Hyderabad Metro Rail at Miyapur Metro Station, on Tuesday

ber Gajendra Haldia, an expert in PPP. We, along with senior railway experts, brainstormed over months to come out with a model Concessionaire Agreement and a Manual of Specifications & Standards making it technology neutral, a first of its kind in the country," he points out. The challenge for Mr. Reddy, involved from day one in planning, designing and overseeing the work for the last 10 years, was to "encourage the private sector giant while keeping the public interest in mind".

If Satyam fiasco undid the Maytas deal less than a year after it bagged the contract

(2007-08) promising an astounding return of investment to the Government, L&T bagged the contract and quickly did financial closure before the trouble began in the form of delays in land acquisition, shift in utilities and court cases even as land sharks, voluntary organisations and heritage activists, among others, came out in full force against the project.

CM's backing

While the Congress-led governments gave initial impetus, the MD wants to credit TS Government for taking "bold steps" to tackle the legal cases. "Chief Minister K.

Chandrasekhar Rao directed the Advocate General to deal with court cases and we handled 340 out of 350 cases filed against the project successfully. Best thing was when K.T. Rama Rao took over as Municipal Administration Minister. Having CS heading the special task force to deal with inter-departmental issues was another step which eased matters," he explains.

Surely, the demand for alignment change and leak of letter where L&TMRH threatened to walk out were troublesome times too? "I worked with five CMs and 12 chief secretaries. First thing

Ready to run

- Metro services between Nagole to Miyapur for a distance of 30 km
- Trains run from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. with halt at all the 24 stations enroute
- Passengers from Nagole will have to climb another platform at Ameerpet to go to Miyapur
- Passengers from Miyapur will have to climb down to another platform at Ameerpet to go to Nagole
- There will be a train every 15 minutes

everyone expected was I would be removed," he laughs, while adding that without support from political leadership and top officials it was impossible to get the project moving.

Role model

Handling recalcitrant groups called for "diplomacy, tact and maintaining a low profile at times". "Whenever things got complicated I only got more determined because I totally believed in the model and was told so by luminaries like Montek Singh Ahluwalia apart from Mr. Haldia," he adds, happy to see the metro trains moving.