



Date 06-12-2023

HeadLine: Infra companies say already working shifts where feasible

Newspaper: Business Standard

Language: English

Journalist: AMRITHA PILLAY

Edition: Mumbai

Page No. 6

Position: Top

Height: 15

Column: 4

MURTHY'S ADVICE TO WORK BEYOND 11-5

Infra companies say already working shifts where feasible

AMRITHA PILLAY
Mumbai, 5 December

India's infrastructure (infra) sector is already sweating out its human capital, according to executives in the field reacting to Infosys co-founder N R Narayana Murthy's recent comments urging the industry to increase shifts.

Last week, Murthy, during a fireside chat moderated by Nikhil Kamath, co-founder of the brokerage platform Zerodha, said, "People in the infra industry must work three shifts a day."

Infra executives point out that, where feasible, most infra projects are already operating different shifts.

"Infra project agencies already work day and night on mega projects, depending on the regulations in different city limits," said R A Rajeev, former metropolitan commissioner, Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA), who supervised the construction of Mumbai's Metro network system during his tenure. MMRDA is responsible for several infra projects in Mumbai, including under-construction Metro projects. "Almost all girders for the



ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA

"INFRA AGENCIES ALREADY WORK DAY AND NIGHT ON MEGA PROJECTS, DEPENDING ON REGULATIONS IN DIFFERENT CITY LIMITS"

R A RAJEEV,
Former metropolitan commissioner, MMRDA

Metro project in Mumbai were launched at night. Major elements are precast outside but cannot be transported and launched during the daytime due to traffic and can only be done at night," he said.

Girders are metal structures used to build bridges. Murthy, in his comments, further said, "Merely working a single shift from 11 am to 5 pm is not sufficient."

Rajeev, however, added, "Staff at many engineering companies are

already putting in 12 hours." Amit Uplenchwar, director of Kalpataru Projects International, commented, "In most cases, projects operate on a single shift of eight hours. Depending on project priority, working hours may be extended to 10-12 hours per shift. We also have project sites where we operate with two to three shifts, ensuring non-stop 24-hour operation. This is based on favourable site conditions and tight

timelines for those specific projects."

Another executive from a major road construction company added, "Most projects already operate in two shifts. One can consider increasing shifts if it does not translate into more man-hours per person." He added, "Three shifts are largely doable but may not be feasible in all projects. It will need a change in mindset, including local conditions that have to be conducive to adjust to continuous work going around."

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation's infra performance report for September listed 10 reasons that led to slow progress/shortfall in road construction. In addition to slow progress from contractors, the others were related to litigations, approvals, utility shifting, cash flow crunch, and other force majeure events. Others from the industry note that there is a clear incentive to complete projects in the least time possible. For instance, in the new engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) model, projects are contracted for a fixed term, fixed time, and fixed cost.

There is a shift from an item rate construction contract to an EPC (lump sum) contract to minimise time and cost overruns, as noted in the latest National Highways Authority of India annual report. "In general, all infra companies are working 24x7 to achieve targets and project timelines mentioned in the agreement. Currently, all projects are required to be completed within a 24-month time limit, so if we do not work 24x7, the project will not be completed in 24 months," said a senior executive from an infra firm.

