

January 17, 2021

Gajendra Haldea (1949-2021): A selfless infrastructure expert



With Gajendra Haldea's demise, a former 1973 batch IAS officer, on January 15 at the age of 71, the country has lost a selfless infrastructure expert who was entirely devoted to infrastructure projects and its implementation in the recent decades.

From saving thousands of crores for the central exchequer through his astute advice on rejecting the one-sided contracts proposed by foreign power producers such as Enron to being the architect of the institutional and policy framework on infrastructure besides the standardised model documents for attracting private participation in infrastructure projects, Haldea's contribution was immense and noteworthy.

During his nearly decade long stint in the Finance Ministry in the mid-nineties, Haldea as Joint Secretary also left his stamp on important legislation like the Foreign Exchange Management Act 1999 and later the Electricity Act 2003 (broke the monopoly of power distribution companies).

After his stint in Finance Ministry, he later joined erstwhile Planning Commission as head of the Secretariat for Infrastructure and PPP. His contribution at the Planning Commission included a 19-volume series on public-private partnerships in India. The government has published over 31 books authored by him in the infrastructure space.

All national highway projects are currently being built based on various model documents authored by him for Build Operate and Transfer, annuity and EPC projects. The PPP projects based on his work include over 300 highway projects, numerous power generation and transmission projects, Hyderabad Metro Rail Project, Vizhinjam Port in Kerala and a \$ 6 billion contract for production and maintenance of locomotives, among others.

Besides serving the Boards of several public sector banks and state-owned companies, Haldea was an advisor to Several State Governments during the past two decades... suppose one wants to get a good sense of India's infrastructure reforms. In that case, his book on "Infrastructure at Crossroads: The challenges of Governance" (Oxford University Press) is a must-read.

Less known is how Haldea helped save the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor project from the turmoil and subsequent mess in IL&FS. His timely intervention ensured that 20,000 crore of government funds did not in 2013 find its way to Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor Development Corporation, which was set up by IL&FS and the Department of Industrial Policy Promotion (DIPP) in 2008 for building industrial townships across States.