

Mahindra World City gears up for the next decade

(Coming up: Hospital, Holiday Inn Express hotel, 1,500 apartments)



Mr Arun Nanda, Chairman, Mahindra Lifespace Developers, at the Mahindra World City SEZ, near Chennai. – Bijoy Ghosh

Chennai, Sept. 22:

Ten years on is a good time to look back and reflect, says Mr Arun Nanda, Chairman, Mahindra Lifespace, which is the promoter for Mahindra World City, the special economic zone set up 35 km from Chennai.

But, as the city, planned for 'work, live and play' enters its second decade, there won't be much time for that as it intends to grow at a frenetic pace.

Now that the city, conceived by the Mahindras, among the first such by the private sector, has many businesses from Infosys to BMW humming, it is going to focus on other aspects of developing the city: plans are afoot to open a full-fledged hospital, a four-star 120-room Holiday Inn Express will spring up in two years' time, and the next couple of years will see 1,500 apartments coming up to accommodate some of the 25,000 people who work in the city.

And, Mr Nanda talks of setting up a full-fledged club house for those who live there and also intends a water front promenade on the banks of the vast and picturesque lake Kolavai which abuts the property.

Given the success of the city in attracting software companies – Infosys, as the anchor company employs 17,000 professionals there – Mahindra is in the running to bag a project from a neighbouring country to set up a knowledge city.

“We have emerged as the front runner for the project,” says Mr Nanda.

In a chat with *Business Line*, Mr Nanda looked back on the 10 years of Mahindra City's growth and says the ambitious project may have never been if two people, apart from Mr Keshub and Mr Anand Mahindra, hadn't bought into his vision for the city: Mr Deepak Parekh of HDFC who visited the site after the Mahindras had developed 800 acres of the 1,300 acres it had initially acquired, and the other is Infosys' Mr N.R. Narayana Murthy.

Mr Parekh gave the City a 10-year loan for with a five-year moratorium. “We made a presentation to Mr Murthy and asked him if we were on the right path with the planned city or barking up the wrong tree,” recalls Mr Nanda.

One day, Mr Murthy, just off an international flight, visited the site a 7 a.m. with no Mahindra official present and decided on the spot that this was the future and Infy came to Mahindra City as the first big company and soon other top companies followed.

“It gives me immense satisfaction to see scores of young men with backpacks and earphones getting off at the station (Paranur railway station which Mahindra developed along with the Railways) to work here,” says Mr Nanda.

At present, the plug and play business zone, whose roads to sanitation is maintained by the Mahindras, has attracted 60 companies with 35 operational and the rest coming up. The exports from the three sector-specific SEZs were Rs 3,500 crore in FY 2011.

Collectively, says Mr Nanda, the companies have invested approximately Rs 3,000 crore.

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