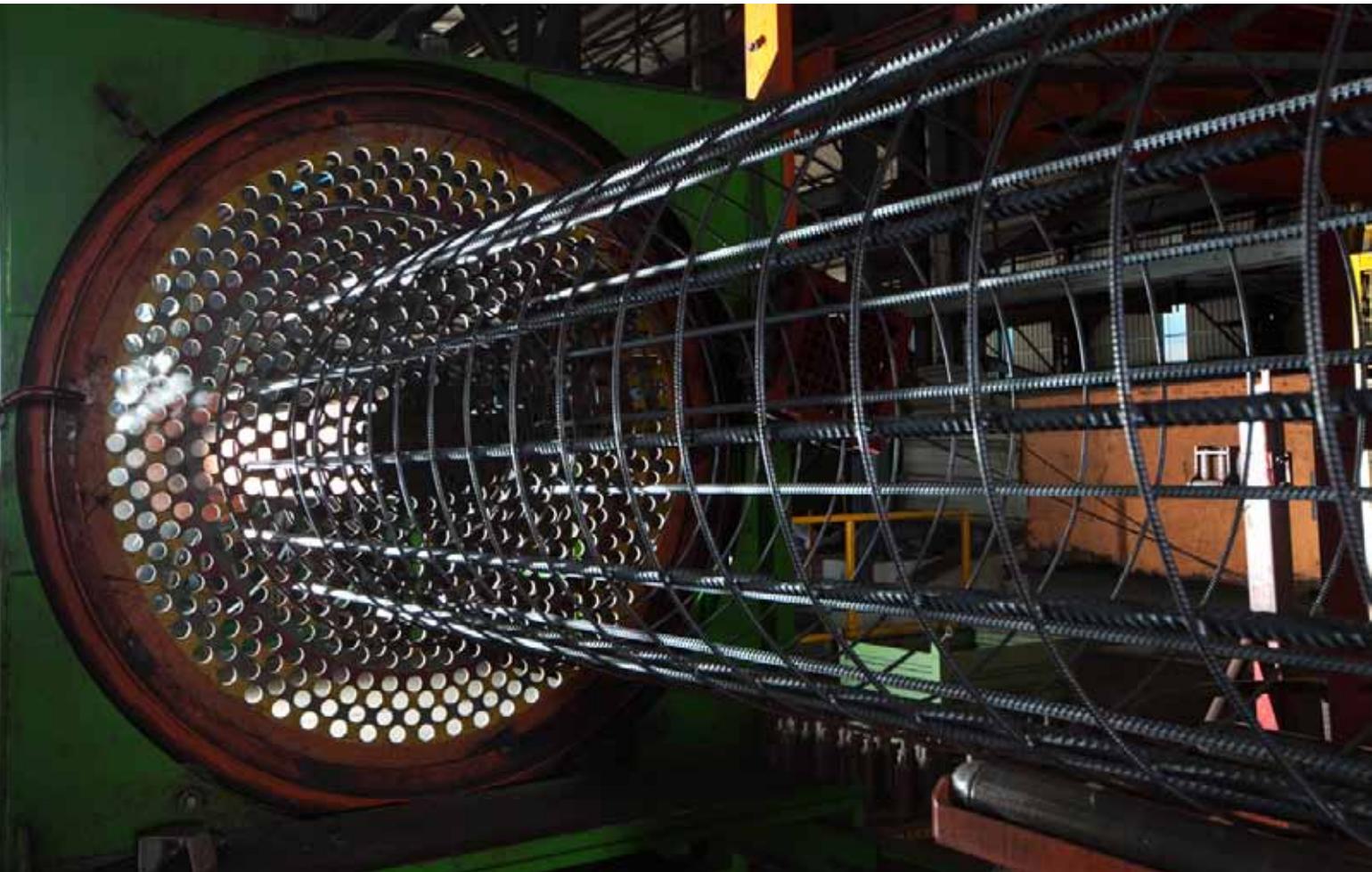


NATSTEEL

AS STRONG AS STEEL



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President and CEO, Vivek Kamra, discusses how the success of NatSteel's offsite prefabrication of steel reinforcement products and services have helped refocus the business into becoming a total solutions provider

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NatSteel delivers over 1000 different shapes of Cut & Bend products to suit customer needs

There are very few places,” states President and Chief Executive Officer, Vivek Kamra, “that have provided a good economic environment to operate in over the last year or so. However, despite the challenges that exist, developing economies within South East Asia have remained reasonably robust.”

The economies that Vivek speaks of include those of China, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines and Singapore. These are the countries in which NatSteel, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Tata Steel, today employs more than 3,000 employees. Constantly working to push the frontiers when it comes to manufacturing processes, every year NatSteel produces close to two million tonnes of premium steel products for the construction industry in the region.

In Singapore, the company’s steel products are used for residential, commercial and industrial buildings, and infrastructural works like bridges and MRT lines. “Singapore,” Vivek continues, “has strong construction growth in recent times, both in terms of its own infrastructure and through the many housing projects that have risen to cater for an ever-growing population.”

With the population of Singapore touching the 5.5 million mark, moves have been taken to not only improve the housing situation, but also the city-state’s road and public transportation networks. These programmes are helping to drive growth within the construction sector, as are moves to completely revamp Singapore’s fibre optic and power networks. These undertakings are core to Singapore’s growth plans for the next fifteen years.



NatSteel's prefabrication facilities ensures consistent, high quality of products for customers

One of NatSteel's specialisations over the years has been its expertise in providing offsite prefabrication of steel reinforcement products and services. Across its Asian operations, NatSteel continues to witness several key trends that are driving the shift towards these, specifically the demand for higher productivity while maintaining safety standards, manpower constraints, space restrictions at construction sites, a demand for faster construction speeds and the need to reduce material wastage.

"Customers are increasingly recognising the many benefits these products and services have to offer," Vivek explains. "The biggest of these is the yield benefits customers receive from seeing their amount of wastage fall dramatically, that is perhaps the most positive shift they immediately see when moving away from onsite fabrication."

Having had success providing offsite prefabrication of steel reinforcement products and services in its core markets, NatSteel now has several initiatives underway to expand its offering into other regions. "Singapore on its own has a very unique geography that lends itself favourably to offsite fabrication," Vivek says. "What this means is that rather than simply replicating the model we have here, we have had to customise it to suit the different needs or different locations."

In India it is currently promoting the concept to its parent company while also driving it through small service centres where labour remains competitively priced. "One of the things we are doing in small, built-up locations in India," Vivek says, "is promoting the idea of offsite fabrication by highlighting how it can actually improve onsite productivity. To date



NatSteel's logistics service

we have established ten service centres that work to promote these products and services in the country's major metropolitan areas."

Elsewhere, the company has commenced with efforts to promote its offsite prefabrication of steel reinforcement products and services in Malaysia and China, where it is establishing a facility in the city of Xiamen. Meanwhile, the company already has distribution and processing centres set up in Australia where it is working with its customers to significantly improve their manpower productivity levels.

"In Australia," Vivek highlights, "we have made considerable progress in automating

our various lines, thus reducing the labour content required for offsite fabrication substantially. As a result of this, productivity levels in a number of our plants have now reached global benchmarks."

As one would expect, there are a number of successful case studies that showcase the positive results that have been achieved through the use of NatSteel's prefabricated solutions and expertise. Perhaps the one that stands out the most was the construction of the Stevens underground MRT Station in Singapore, whose site was located on an existing road junction and in a tight urban

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setting surrounded by bridges, houses and was subject to heavy traffic volumes. The project was beset by a number of challenges. These included the extremely limited site space as a major portion of the road had to be kept open for traffic, significant manpower restrictions due to the government’s stringent foreign manpower policies, site safety and a very tight construction schedule. In addition, the delivery of prefabricated cages to site needed to be perfectly coordinated and timed to minimise obstruction to traffic flow and

for immediate onsite installation so as not to choke the limited site space.

NatSteel provided prefabricated cage solutions for the Stevens MRT station’s diaphragm walls. The cages, which were designed and fabricated precisely at NatSteel’s factory with various cage accessories such as lifting hooks and stiffeners, were delivered just-in-time in order to help the customer overcome these challenges. The cages were pre-installed with couplers for easier basement construction which saved significant construction time.

“IT IS CLEAR THAT THE DAYS OF NATSTEEL SEEING ITSELF AS SIMPLY A STEEL SUPPLIER ARE IN THE PAST”



NatSteel’s automated downstream facilities



The Sidelifter system from NatSteel enhances the safety and productivity of material handling onsite

Furthermore, the customer was able to save a significant cost by eliminating material wastages and by reducing the level of manpower required onsite, while at the same time maintaining a safe working environment.

By delivering its building solutions at the optimum time, NatSteel ensured it did not choke the limited site space, while the use of these solutions helped relieve the customer of the manpower challenges they had originally faced. Furthermore, site safety was improved and better site management was achieved as a result of there being no rebar fabrication activity taking place onsite, while the customer also benefited from the savings they made from elimination onsite rebar wastage.

As Vivek reflects on where the company stands today and where it wants to go in the

future it is clear that the days of NatSteel seeing itself as simply a steel supplier are in the past. “The interactions we have today with our customers exist on the basis of us being a seller of solutions, not steel. As we continue moving our business further downstream we will investigate ways that we can expand and establish more of these solution centres into other parts of South East Asia where growth opportunities in the construction sector exist. Meanwhile, we will continue to work to offset the challenges our customers face, providing them with ways to improve productivity.”

For more information about NatSteel visit: www.natsteel.com.sg



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