

# A new approach to urban planning!

Urban dwellers in India struggle with chaos, pollution, dirt, absence of safety norms for citizens, and much more. Yet cities are growing, migration is on the rise and planners are going about implementing their own tried and tested methods of accommodating more people into our cities. All this is happening rather mindlessly and mechanically. Well, at times we do hear someone talking about habitable cities. Pradeep Kumar Saxena, a veteran architect and urbanist speaks to Urban Update and presents a new perspective on urban development



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**You have placed before the country an entirely new urbanism approach. What is the reason for suggesting a complete change in city planning?**

We all have noticed that pollution, congestion, crimes, commuting time, etc. have been increasing every year at a fast pace in every Indian cities, deteriorating life of urban citizen year by year. Most important basic reason for this trend is faulty urban planning.

**Reading your exhaustive book, one gets an impression that nothing is right about the current practice of urban planning in India. Is that so?**

I profess to retain basic principles of applied geometry, shift from selected planner's vocabulary and emphasis on certain necessary things we had been neglecting in our urban planning in last 100 years.

**Have you had wide ranging consultations across the country to propagate your idea among planners and policy makers?**

Yes, I have interacted with planners, scholars, policy makers, media professionals, army, navy, air force and BSF officers, doctors, educationists, engineers from various disciplines, industrialists, builders, businessman, bankers, risk factor evaluators, rural citizens and urban poor, etc. for one to one and group discussions in different Indian states. I am also in regular touch with professionals in US, Canada, Australia and Europe. Some National level workshops are still required to be organized preferably by Government.

**India has been known for scientific urban planning since Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro civilisations. Where did we go wrong in the last couple of centuries?**

We blindly adopted colonial planning norms. After Second World War, Europe got a chance to do most of their cities afresh and changed norms formulated

in early 20th century. We continued with old thinking and started enforcing them at large scale after 60s.

**Have you taken into consideration the role of local self-governing bodies or panchayats when you talk of new planning areas and processes?**

The Constitution was amended perhaps in early 90's to give powers related to the subject to local self-governments and panchayats. Still these powers and responsibilities have not been transferred fully to them by state govts. For example in MP still city master plans are being prepared by state governments and not local self govt. Present law is not very clear about green field cities. As a matter of routine, laws are made, amended and removed

as per social requirement. However any major change in law will not be required to execute the suggested plan for human settlement.

**Well, I agree our cities are in a mess, but is a complete U-turn possible now?**

Total U-turn is not required. My plan is to reduce load on existing urban centres by making some new cities with much better opportunities. The plan is to provide rural and inter-city migrants with superior housing & amenities with progressive employment with limited involvement of the govt. The plan gives a solution to do it in the most economical way and with flexibility in the speed to match the reduction or increase in flow of natural migrants. It

will also enable us to base development plans of existing cities on facts instead of assumptions.

**If I presume your alternate plan for entire country is to be implemented, how many years will it take?**

In India urban population is 31% (though some states are touching 50% mark and states like Bihar have only about 12% population living in urban centres), world average is about 50% and most of rich countries have an average of about 80%. It can only be assumed whether India will touch 70% or 80% mark? It is also debatable whether process of urbanisation will be completed by 2070 or 2100. At present about 1.0 crore rural citizens are moving to urban centres every year and it is calculated assumption that India's 50% population will be living in urban areas by 2050. The model proposed by me is for overall human settlement in our country. Its execution will result into minimizing long distance migration and reduction in migrations by 25% (migration in India is neither a subject of centre nor state govts.). It will bring closer the final date of completion of the process of urbanisation and restrict the urban population percentage to 65. It will also result into nearly uniform urbanisation in every state.

**What's your take on Smart cities scheme? Will they bring peace and end chaos in cities or there is something more than meets the eye? No comments.**

**Finally, who will, if at all, undertake such a gigantic plan?**

To undertake the plan we will have to train professionals. It will be useful if we create a separate cadre for the work. Since the plan is proposed to be implemented by rotational funds, we will be able to rotate the skilled human force also and the work will run smoothly after initial teething trouble usually faced in every new work. The work is to be initiated at PMO level as it will have impact on thinking in at least 18 ministries and require co-ordination between them. ■

## Rethinking Urbanism

Much before this 'New Urban Agenda' was declared at Quito on October 20 this year, PK Saxena, an Indian architect, had been grappling with the idea of providing an entirely new urbanisation model for the country of 1.2 billion people on exactly the same lines.

According to the author 'this cost-effective India-specific model of urbanisation human settlement' will provide strong urban infrastructure leading us to urbanism, economic growth and a strong social set up which does not exist as of now. The plan projections are for 2040 and expects 30 crore rural migrants and beyond into the cities. The model talks about provision by the Government for a revolving fund, using only one per cent of arable land required to be diverted for urbanisation from agriculture use by 2040. The funds would be paid back to Government under a formula (by those who would buy lands for development after these cities are created) and thus are again available for another set of cities. He mentions that 100 such cities would be created, if strict timelines are maintained, in 26 years.

It would also create new opportunities for professionals, from accountancy to administration and agriculture to aviation, besides of course in other sectors like finance, health tourism and transport, to name just a few. Meaning thereby a huge scope for employment is factored into the plan.

After giving extensive details of the present-day ills and suffering or data of problem-ridden Indian urban scenario, Saxena offers to set up new cities away from the existing big cities, say between Ahmedabad and Baroda or Indore and Bhopal, utilising non-arable land. His model stipulates that new cities would be located on low cost land, of course under government ownership with many benefits. They will be smaller cities, manageable cities.

The argument in the new approach is that the satellite towns created in India for decongestion of the cities like Delhi and Mumbai have not worked out well. Noida, Gurgaon, Navi Mumbai for example, are in the close vicinity of the metro cities and have added to the problems and the purpose was defeated.

