

PRESS RELEASE 2

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"HABITAT SUMMIT OUTLINES URBAN MOBILITY AGENDA FOR INDIA"

1st HABITAT SUMMIT – A PLATFORM FOR DEVELOPING LIVEABLE CITIES IN INDIA

Continuing with the theme of 'Alternative Urban Futures for India', the second day of the 1st Habitat Summit, a joint initiative of India Habitat Centre and Urban Habitats Forum, brought up the issue of urban mobility and the need to transform urban transport infrastructure to make our urban spaces more liveable. Chairing the session on *The Politics of Urban Mobility: Evolving a National Urban Transport Strategy*, **Prof. K.C. Sivaramakrishnan, Chairman, Centre for Policy Research**, laid down a ten-point framework for the discussion at the very onset of the session. This included: (i) Whether we want to move people and goods, or move vehicles?, (ii) About 20-60% of our country's population still walks, (iii) Private cars still dominate the urban mode of transport with 263 cars and 433 two-wheelers being added per day in 2003-04, (iv) the politics of road space allocation, (v) the politics of road space pricing, (vi) the politics of public and private funding where the tax system disfavours public transport, (vii) the politics of mass transit choices, (viii) the politics of route choices, (ix) Phase I of JNNURM: Where 15,260 buses will be brought in, but where is the space?, and (x) the politics of real estate and city planning: With inter and intra-city implications.

Presiding over the session was **Mr. Jaipal Reddy, Minister for Urban Development, Government of India**, who gave his comments after hearing what the other speakers had to say on the subject. "Before I became a minister, I was a supporter of public transport systems. Since I became (the urban development) minister, I have become a champion of public transport systems", he said, addressing an audience of over 500 delegates including policymakers, practitioners, students and young professionals. Talking about the need to concentrate on improving urban transport, Mr. Reddy also brought up the larger issue of climate change. He said that the Government of India has adopted the national urban transport policy with an emphasis on moving people rather than moving vehicles. However, there has been a problem in implementation because our society is divided by sections that are elitist in their aspirations, he added.

Mr. Reddy lauded the efforts of the Delhi government for having embarked on its own bus rapid transit (BRT) system. This system has now been extended by the Government of India to 9 different cities across the country where separate roads have been constructed for implementation of the BRT systems. **Mr. Rakesh Mehta, Chief Secretary of the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi** was also one of the discussion leaders at the session.

Mr. Reddy further highlighted some key initiatives of the Government of India towards improving mobility in our urban spaces, which include bringing down the excise duty on buses, and pushing to bring them down to a near zero level. "All state governments should exempt buses from excise duty or sales tax", he said.

Mr. Mehta, on the other hand, emphasised the creation of value systems that are common across all agencies. A critical problem in this regard has been the multiplicity of implementation authorities in urban centres of growth. "This hampers mobility policy and implementation of integrated transport systems," he said. He supported the idea of a transit authority that can bring all implementation agencies on a common level. An effort should be made to provide every person a suitable mode of public transport within half a kilometre of their residence. In the future, however, he added, the green agenda will drive policy.

Prof. Philipp Rode, Executive Director, Urban Age, London School of Economics and Political Science, presented the model that London authorities have adopted to combat traffic congestion. A congestion charge is levied on cars entering Central London, and this model has brought about a significant reduction in the usage of 80,000 cars. "With fewer vehicles on the streets, bus reliability and usage has significantly increased," he said. Some areas in London have been solely kept for use by pedestrians. In fact, even Shanghai has a pedestrian street, he added. He emphasized the need for analysing and adopting such pivotal solutions in an Indian framework.

Mr. Sam Miller, Author, *Delhi: Adventures in a Mega City*, pointed out to the role that children play in the whole process of encouraging more people to walk and use public transport. If children today are habituated and made captive to luxury cars, they will never use public transport as adults. Through the medium of photography he highlighted the problems pedestrians face in different areas of Delhi. The main objective was to draw attention to the fact that planners need to be more receptive to the needs of pedestrians.

Prof. Geetam Tiwari of Transportation Research and Injury Prevention Programme, Indian Institute of Technology Delhi busted three common myths ailing the Indian mindset when it comes to urban transport. These were:

- (i) *Road congestion can be reduced by building flyovers.* Here she cited the example of Shanghai, which invested USD 5 billion in flyovers only to keep the average speed of cars at a dismal 15 km an hour.
- (ii) *Pollution and road accidents can be decreased by the use of the Metro.* This will only happen if we reduce the space provided to people who use vehicles.
- (iii) *Air pollution can be reduced by using fuel efficient cars and cleaner fuels.* The effect of these measures is nullified because of the huge quantum of cars. Therefore, there is a need to build sustainable solutions in the Indian setup.

To take forward the discussion on urban mobility, Institute of Urban Transport is organizing the Urban Mobility Conference later this year in December.

Later in the day, delivering the keynote address in a special theme session on *Alternative Futures for India*, **Ms. Kiran Dhingra, Secretary, Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, Government of India**, stressed on the need to hasten things up for a better urban future. When we think of an urban future, what stares us in the face is a horrendous picture, she said. She went on to add that the parabola of development is such that people are drawn to urban centres in search of jobs and opportunities. In such a situation, suffering housing shortages of about 250 lakh, despite missions such as the JNNURM focused solely on the provision of affordable housing, is dismal. "Thirty percent of the urban population lives on less than 3% of the land and generates more than 60% of GDP. If this 30% increases to 50%, unless we increase the landmass of 3% we are likely to have a fallout on the last figure, which is the GDP of the urban areas", she said.

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The India Habitat Centre was conceived to provide a physical environment which would serve as a catalyst for a synergetic relationship between individuals and institutions working in diverse habitat related areas and therefore, maximise their total effectiveness. (www.indiahabitat.org)

Mirabilis Advisory is an international economic development consultancy that works in the area of globalization, sustainability and entrepreneurship.

Urban Habitats Forum is a public awareness platform established by Mirabilis Advisory in partnership with India Habitat Centre, and designed as a collaborative network of multidisciplinary thinkers and change-makers to push for innovation in shaping the next generation of cities in India. The forum aims to mobilise action through intelligent discourse, impactful research and result-driven advocacy.