

PRESS RELEASE 4

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"HABITAT SUMMIT COMES TO AN END: EFFORT LAUDED BY DELHI CHIEF MINISTER"

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

Whose City is it Anyway?

Every city has multiple stakeholders – the State, the city management, the businesses operating in that city and the residents themselves. The fact that this multiplicity in ownership is responsible – if only to an extent – for the mismanagement of our cities, shaped the theme of the penultimate session of the 1st Habitat Summit, *The Future City: Whose City is it Anyway?*

Chaired by **Mr. Arun Maira, Member, Planning Commission, Government of India**, the session was a motivated panel discussion between an eclectic group of personalities including **Ms. Meera Sanyal, Executive Vice President and Country Head, ABN Amro India**, **Mr. Jehangir Pocha, Co-promoter, NewsX**, **Mr. Ravi Singh, CEO, WWF-India**, **Mr. Kiran Karnik, President, India Habitat Centre**, **Mr. Arbind Singh, Founder, Nidan and Coordinator, National Association of Street Vendors of India** and **Prof. K.C. Sivaramakrishnan, Chairman, Centre for Policy Research**.

The discussion evolved on the basis of two key questions raised by Mr. Maira over the course of the session: (i) what is a city, and (ii) who does the city belong to?

While Mr. Pocha was of the view that there needs to be a "national conglomeration of identity" for a city to have identity, Ms. Sanyal said that a city is a place where everyone, including its poorest, can live with dignity. Taking the cue from here, Mr. Maira took the opportunity to engage with the audience and get their view on what does one want most out of their cities – (i) liveability, (ii) dignity, or (iii) green spaces and cleanliness? An overwhelming majority favoured 'dignity' over everything else.

There were diverse views in the panel on who exactly a city belongs to. While Ms. Sanyal said it should belong to the children, Mr. Arbind Singh quipped that our cities only belong to the municipality commissioners. Mr. Pocha, on the other hand, said that every city should belong to its residents only and that it is crucial to identify who a city does not belong to. Citing the example of the US, taxation is far more decentralised unlike India, he said, the resident knows that a part of the tax he is paying is going directly to the city. Prof. Sivaramakrishnan, perhaps, summarized the debate best with the thought that our cities belong to everyone and criticised the notion of 'legal' and 'illegal' residents. "We believe that by segregating people on various grounds we will be able to contain them," he said, adding that that does not happen.

As the discussion moved on, a consensus started emerging on the role played by each stakeholder in making their cities more liveable. Mr. Maira finally concluded with the thought that there has to be a “mass server” in the form of mini public forums for disseminating such ideas and gathering consensus on the issue.

Address by Mrs. Sheila Dikshit, Chief Minister, National Capital Territory of Delhi

The session was followed by a keynote address by Mrs. Sheila Dikshit, Chief Minister of National Capital Territory of Delhi in the session on *Creating ‘Champion Cities’: Delivering Enduring Urban Legacies*. “Delhi belongs to all Indians,” she said, adding that Delhi may not be blessed with natural resources such as the sea and mountains, but it has its own resources that it must build on. “It is very hard to hit the head of the bureaucrat,” she quipped, quickly adding, “with all due respect to the bureaucrats – past and present – here. Doing anything without their support would be impossible.”

Towards the end of the session, in response to the audience’s queries on the status of preparations for the Commonwealth Games, she commented, “*acche ho jayenge, hamare yahan shaadi hoti hai ki nahin?*”

Addressing queries on what can be done for the Yamuna and whether one can see any change before the Games, she confessed that Yamuna will not be fixed before the Commonwealth Games because it is too near. “Also, too many efforts have been made to save the Yamuna but none of them have worked,” she said. She added that the Delhi government has initiated something, but will not be able to achieve anything before 8-10 years.

The session was chaired by Mr. Kiran Karnik and **Mr. Paul Taylor, Office of the Executive Director, UN-Habitat.**

‘Delhi Within’ Ideas Competition: Result

The session, and the 1st Habitat Summit, came to an end with the announcement of the winner of the **‘Delhi Within’ Ideas Competition** organised by India Habitat Centre and Urban Habitats Forum as a part of the Summit. The winning entry titled **‘Power of Seeing’** by Navtej Johar gets a prize of Rs 1 lakh.

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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.