Urban Update

Volume VI, Issue VIII

DECEMBER 2020

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2020

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UrbanUpdate

A monthly magazine published by the AIILSG — a project funded by European Union's 'Equi-City' programme for India.

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AIILSG

2020; A YEAR OF CHALLENGES

Rajiv Agarwal
Editor-In-Chief
dg@aiilsg.org

As we approach the close of calendar year 2020, it is as always, a time to look at the year that was. The year has been an extraordinary one. The coronavirus pandemic occupied most of the media space and the bulk of people's mindshare during the year. The pandemic has had big impact on economies of nations, mostly the urban and industrial sectors. Thankfully the rural economy has been much less affected with agricultural activity remaining resilient and farm output robust.

Severe lockdowns placed many restrictions on citizens' movement. Inter-city, inter-district and inter-state movement of citizens was strictly regulated or disallowed. All businesses, except those catering to the grocery, vegetable, and medical needs of residents, remained closed. Malls, multiplexes, schools, colleges, religious places remained shut, some still so. In short, life in our cities became very different from what we were used to. With offices remaining shut, 'Work from Home' or WFM became the new normal. Schools and colleges employed new teaching tools while embracing the 'online' mode.

Cities and local governments faced possibly the most challenging time in recent years. They had to control and monitor the spread of the virus with the already stretched local healthcare infrastructure – to undertake testing, tracing, quarantine, and care for the affected. Temporary quarantine and care facilities were set up with all the infrastructure and facilities including food and medicines, trained medical and para medical personnel, and security. Each large city needed several of these make shift 'COVID hospitals'. Among the biggest challenges they faced was the resource crunch. On the one hand was the huge, unbudgeted expense of the COVID related work; and on the other, the sharply reduced incomes on account of depressed business activity. A detailed understanding of the impact on local body finances will emerge in the coming weeks and months. Admirably however, normal city services like water supply, waste collection and disposal, and city upkeep remained on track and near normal. Unhindered supply of essentials was also ensured. Our local bodies deserve praise on this count.

One disappointment during the COVID times is that many of the important urban programmes which were underway lost momentum with the onset of the pandemic. With all focus on managing the coronavirus, other programmes took a backseat. One such area was waste reduction, recycling, etc. The plastic ban implementation suffered and use of plastic increased. Fearing the coronavirus infection, citizens turned away from reusable bags, plates, spoons, forks and glasses, towards disposable plastic or paper ones. Add to this the mountains of waste generated by disposed/used masks, gloves and other protective equipment. It could be a long time before we get back on the 'less plastic' path. Another area is water conservation. While awareness building had gained some traction at the national level, with the onset of the pandemic, progress has been limited. Given the precarious water situation in many of our cities, we need urgent measures to conserve, reuse and recycle this precious resource. We must take up these programmes again in right earnest.

Now, with a safe and effective vaccine in sight, a new set of challenges could arise. Our cities need to once again come up with effective programmes to store, transport, and administer the vaccine to large populations effectively and equitably so we can look forward to a safer future.

On this note, I wish our readers and well-wishers a happy, healthy and prosperous new year. ■

"

There are many vaccines being produced in countries around the world but there's only one nation that has the manufacturing capacity to produce sufficient quantities to satisfy the demands of citizens in every country, and that's India

Barry Robert O'Farrell
Australia's High Commissioner to India

"

It is evident that the labor market is still in crisis. The gap between now and when a vaccine is widely distributed looms large. There's a lot of uncertainty ahead for the labor market going into the New Year

AnnElizabeth Konkel
Economist at the Indeed Hiring Lab

PIN POINT

"

As we get closer to the COVID-19 vaccine rollout, the fundamentals of the economy being strong, we see a rapid V-shaped recovery in the overall consumption of petroleum products

S M Vaidya
Chairman of Indian Oil Corporation

"

Whether (the world) gets better for everyone depends on the actions of the world's leaders and their commitment to deliver tests, treatments and vaccines to the people who need them

Melinda Gates
Co-chair of the Gates Foundation

BUZZ

United Nations
@UN

The climate crisis has not stopped amid #COVID19. Delaying #ClimateAction costs livelihoods and lives. We need a systemic shift to a more sustainable economy that works for people & the planet
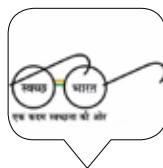
Swachh Bharat I #IndiaFightsCorona
@swachhbharat

Under the #SwachhBharatMission Phase 2, the nation is ready to embark on this journey from #ODF to #ODFPlus with a special focus on sustaining #Swachhata, construction of community #toilets, and Solid and Liquid Waste Management (#SLWM)

UN Development
@UNDP

We support 115 countries to take bolder and more ambitious #ClimateAction. We're laying the building blocks for transformative action - reducing emissions, increasing resilience to climate impacts and protecting ecosystems

Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs
@MoHUA_India

Most of the soil pollution arises from human activities. It is time we realise the importance of sustainable development and growth in #TransformingUrbanLandscape and work towards a greener and environment friendly future. #WorldSoilDay

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COVER STORY

It is no secret that the best lessons are learnt in the worst times. The year 2020 has taught us many lessons. Finally, the year is departing but the lessons learnt should have a far-reaching and deep impact on the way we plan, design and manage our cities

LEADERSPEAK

Urban growth and the evolution of cities have been seen as a panacea to many social issues but the departing year has underlined that it could turn out to be a Pandora's Box if the growth is not managed well. All the global agencies are calling out for sustained, concentrated efforts to fill the gaps in reversed developed gains this year and help cities emerge stronger, sustainable and equitable in the post-pandemic world. Indian municipalities and civil society need to pull up their socks for fast recovery and adopt responsible growth models

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EMPOWERING WOMEN IN JHARKHAND

About 50 per cent of the working population in the age group of 15-49 years in Jharkhand comprise of women. However, due to the low level of literacy and gender inequality, many of the women face discrimination at the workplace and inequalities of pay. The Girl Power project, funded by the European Union (EU), is being implemented by the All India Institute of Local Self-Government (AIILSG) along with its project partners- Mahatma Gandhi Institute for Rural Industrialization (MGIRI), Saunta Gaunta Foundation (SGF) and Magan Sanghralaya Samiti (MSS). The Girl Power project will support over 100 civil society organisations (CSOs) directly and indirectly, working on women rights in 10 districts of Jharkhand. These CSOs in turn will support the social and economic empowerment of 5,000 women. The initiative also aims to enable and empower 5,000 women to become entrepreneurs and establish their business in the social sector.

AIILSG and the EU, on September 10, 2020, launched the Girl Power project to further support capacity building of civil society organisations working in the area of women empowerment in Jharkhand.

Badal Patralekh, Minister of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Co-operative, Government of Jharkhand, launched the project and addressed the gathering in the presence of Chami Murmu, prominent social worker, Secretary of Sahyogi Mahila and State Head of Udyogini; Rajkumar, and Shilpa Mittal Singh, Joint Managing Director of Women on Wings. Murmu, a prominent social worker, received the Nari Shatki Puraskar award from President Ram Nath Kovind for her work on women empowerment in Jharkhand. The event was also graced by Shouvik Datta, Senior Programme Manager, Delegation of the EU to India, who thanked the Government of Jharkhand for their support to the Girl Power Project, and shared experiences of the EU in promoting women's entrepreneurship. Rajiv Agarwal, Director General and Ravi Ranjan Guru, Deputy Director-General, AIILSG, welcomed the participants to the launch event. Representatives of project partner organisations, the MGIRI, MSS and SGF, also spoke on the occasion. A host of dignitaries from the European Union, AIILSG, Government of Jharkhand and CSOs also attended the event.

This project aims to create a network of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and women entrepreneurs, which will act as a support mechanism base for fostering rights and support to women in the state of Jharkhand. The Gender Network for Social Entrepreneurship Jharkhand (GNSE-J) has been established to promote multi-stakeholder participation in the state of Jharkhand. This network will also act as an overall advisory network to share best practices, knowledge sharing and problem-solving. CSO support is the fundamental part of this entire project. The GNSE-J is made up of an Advisory Committee including selected officials from the state government, elected legislators, CSOs, women entrepreneurs, academia and women and girls key stakeholders from Jharkhand.

The brief objective of the Market Connect is to provide a market platform to potential women entrepreneurs in the project areas. This will connect them with a ready marketplace for their business growth and expansion. To make the most effective use of social media with limited time and effort, a comprehensive media outreach strategy has been framed through various social media platforms. To keep the entire idea informed and for knowledge outreach with officials and stakeholders through the social media platforms, social pages are now live for Girl Power Project digital network building.

Finally, the Girl Power Project aims to bring about an overall improvement in the economic conditions of the women in Jharkhand, leading to the overall objectives of socio-economic development at state and national levels. ■

WORKING ON VISION OF INCLUSIVE & CLIMATE RESILIENT CITIES

The goal of the Climate Resilient and Inclusive Cities (CRIC) project is to contribute to sustainable integrated urban development, good governance, and climate adaptation/mitigation through long lasting partnerships, and tools such as sustainable local action plans, early warning tools and experts' panels

The partners of United Cities and Local Governments Asia-Pacific (UCLG ASPAC) for the CRIC project include, All India Institute of Local Self Government (AIILSG), Association Des Cites Et Des Regions Pour La Gestion Durable Des Ressources, European Network For Community-Led Initiatives On Climate Change And Sustainability (ECOLISE), PILOT4DEV and Universite Paris Est Marne La Valle. The target groups of the Project are local governments; cities; urban stakeholders working on climate resilience, climate mitigation and adaptation & good governance of inclusive cities.

The opening ceremony of the project was held in January 2020 in Jakarta, Indonesia. Dr Bernadia Irawati Tjandradewi, Secretary-General, UCLG ASPAC, said during the inauguration that the impacts of climate change are becoming more intense and frequent, and that we need to accelerate our work to help cities and local governments withstand the effects and protect citizens from future shocks and stresses. Adding to her speech she said that the local political leadership, networks and expertise that we pool together under this project will play a critical role in achieving the project's aim to promote climate resilient and inclusive cities."

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Urban areas host most of the vulnerable populations as well as vital and social infrastructure and local governments have increased pressure to develop services, infrastructure, and employment. The CRIC project aims to strengthen and support social policies and social inclusion of the poorer population. Engagement will be achieved through the involvement of civil society. Improvements in water and sanitation in particular, have a large social impact, especially on the marginalized and vulnerable groups such as rural migrants. The project will also highlight culture through exhibitions.

The project has been designed such that it will have a substantial impact on the achievement of SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities. It supports triangular cooperation through which exchange of knowledge and capacity building among countries such as Malaysia, Vietnam, Philippines, India, Nepal and Bangladesh will take place with their European counterparts. The project will support job creation by the promotion of green jobs and a circular economy.

It is geared towards sustainable and climate resilience policies and action and is promoting a shift towards sustainable and green urban development. It also addresses the question of governance to reach sustainable urban development through capacity building and training materials on good governance.

PROJECT ACTIONS IN 2020

Over the first six months, various events were planned under the CRIC project and several events such as stakeholder meeting, seminars, and expert meetings have taken place. One of the foremost events that took place was the Global Launching of United Network of Circular Cities at the 10th World Urban Forum, Abu Dhabi on February 10, 2020. The event promoted the concept of resources management and circular economy through exchange of resources through a network of cities.

Besides the seminars, CRIC conducted a Focus Group Discussion with the stakeholders over a web-based platform. The discussion brought about valuable information in terms of the current situation and the readiness of each city, in particular, their commitment and agenda. The project works around three pillars including knowledge and exchange, local action plans for climate resilient and inclusive cities, and communication and capacity building.

Four thematic tools are being developed by Pilot4Dev, ACR+, UGE, ECOLISE on air pollution, waste management, early warning system, and water and sanitation. AIILSG would contribute in the consultation, input, and review of tasks, and may also assist UCLAG ASPAC in testing and validating the tools of air pollution. The project has so far received commitment from nine cities for implementation of tools. Creation of nodes for sustainable funding and working groups for the same have been established in five cities including Bandar Lampung, Cirebon, Ternate, Gorontalo, Pekenbaru, by UCLG-ASPAC as coordinator and lead of the project.

Development of platform for online training and course is currently in progress as a project based facility having UCLG-ASPAC as lead coordinator. Online training on Sustainable Urban Design and Development was completed through collaborative engagement of all partners with representations of more than ten delegations from India. ∎

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Rewind 2020
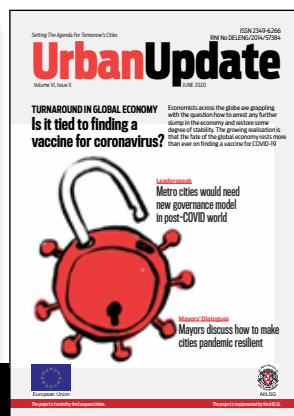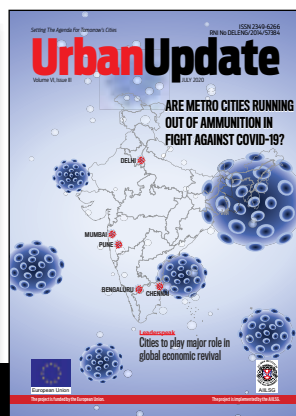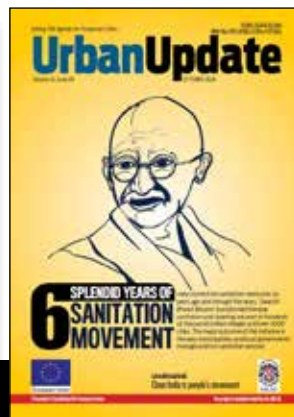
Promoting AYUSH exports due to popularity

NEW DELHI: Government of India has decided to set up a council for promotion of exports of AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Sidha and Homeopathy) products. Shripad Naik, Minister of AYUSH, mentioned the world's growing need of AYUSH- based solutions for disease resistance and treatment during the difficult times of the COVID-19 pandemic.

First waste-to-energy plant in Karnataka

BENGALURU: B S Yediyurappa, Chief Minister, Government of Karnataka, virtually laid the foundation stone of 11.5 mega-watt (MW) power plant to be set up on 10 acres of land in Bidadi, Bengaluru. Officials said that the plant would begin operation from 2022 and the tender for construction of the plant has been given to ISGES Heavy Engineering Limited, Noida and Hitachi Zosen India Pvt Ltd.

UN goals on Climate Change "within reach"

NEW DELHI: A report by the BBC network revealed a recent analysis by Climate Action Tracker, which inferred that the goals of United Nations Paris Climate Agreement may be "within reach." The agency said that if the countries will successfully fulfill their commitments, the rise in global temperatures could be contained to 2.1 degree Celsius by the end of the current century.

Door-to-door testing for TB in Maharashtra from December 1

MUMBAI: The Government of Maharashtra has started a month-long drive to supervise door-to-door screening and detecting tuberculosis (TB) and leprosy cases. The public health department of the state plans to screen the 8.66 crore population across the state, which includes 6.82 crore people in rural areas and 1.84 crore people in urban areas.

Dr R S Adkekar, Assistant Director (Health), Government of Maharashtra, said that very less TB and leprosy cases were reported this year. It is suspected that several new cases in the community have gone unidentified and may have continued to transfer the infection to others. This drive will help control the transmission and put the infected on treatment. Moreover, the drive is also fulfilling the aim of making sure that in view of the COVID-19 pandemic, other diseases do not go unnoticed and spread violently, thereby giving shape to another epidemic.

A team of two health workers like ASHA or anganwadi helper, accompanied by other workers, will visit 20 houses in rural and 25 houses in urban areas every day. Every resident will be inquired about the symptoms of TB such as weight loss, cough, and fever lasting two weeks. Dr Adkekar also said that the people who get confirmed will be asked to undergo a chest X-ray and will be put on treatment. This may also be a part of the state government's long term goal of eliminating TB from the state. According to experts, early detection and treatment is the best method of controlling the spread and reducing the mortality rate of the disease.

Regarding leprosy, the health workers will look for white patches on skin and direct all the suspected cases to health centres for future treatment.

70% usage of mask consistently can contain COVID-19: Study

NEW DELHI: A review of studies suggested that the type of material used and the duration of mask use play a key role in how effectively masks contain the spread of the novel coronavirus. The study found that if around 70 per cent of the people used masks consistently, the COVID-19 pandemic could have been contained. The research has been published in the journal Physics of Fluids and it assessed the studies on face masks and reviewed epidemiological reports on the effectiveness of masks.

Dr Sanjay Kumar, Research Fellow, National University of Singapore, said that effective usage of masks such as surgical masks with 70 per cent effectiveness could eradicate the pandemic. He added that even cloth masks could contain the spread, if worn correctly. Scientists of the study said that size of droplets is the key factor in how the mask functions. Bigger droplets with the size of 5-10 microns are more common than the smaller ones which are more dangerous.

Scientists said that among all the types of masks used, N95 is the only one which filters aerosol-sized droplets. They found that facemasks made up of hybrid polymer materials could filter particles with high efficacy as well as cools the face due to heat escape from beneath the mask. Whatever be the type of mask that is being worn by an individual, the scientists said that properly wearing the mask and wearing it at all possible times is the most simple solution to control, and even end, the pandemic. This must be followed even more diligently till the time mass vaccination drives of people does not start around the world successfully.

₹300 crore for vaccine trials and treatment in Karnataka

BENGALURU: Dr K Sudhakar, Minister of Health and Family Welfare, Government of Karnataka, said that Rs 300 crore have been kept aside for the vaccine trials and free of cost treatment of COVID-19 patients. Karnataka began the phase-3 trials of COVAXIN vaccine by Bharat Biotech at Vydehi Institute of Medical Sciences and Research Centre (VIMSRC). The trials are also being held at JeevanRekha Hospital, Belagavi. The trials are done in collaboration with Clintrac International with around 1,000 volunteers to administer the vaccine in two doses.

Dr D V Chalapathy, co-investigator of the trials, said that the two doses will be given 28 days apart to the volunteers after inspecting their health status. They should be above 18 years of age and should not have any prior exposure to COVID-19 and should not have immuno-deficiencies like cancer, he added. The result of the trails will be submitted to the Drugs Controller General of India and Indian Council for Medical Research for review. K M Srinivas Murthy, Director, VIMSRC, said that Bharat Biotech was instrumental in manufacturing vaccines for other diseases such as H1N1, SARS, Hepatitis and Polio. Dr Sudhakar said that vaccination trials are being conducted across 12 states in 25 centres and a total of almost 26,000 people will be administered the vaccine.

India among top performers in CCPI

NEW DELHI: In the latest global Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) released on December 8, India attained the tenth rank. The CCPI has been developed by non-profit organisations including Germanwatch and New Climate Institute from Germany, in collaboration with the Climate Action Network (CAN). India remained in the top ten performers for the second consecutive year. Though India's position has dropped from ninth to the tenth position, its journey towards climate protection has been very consistent, as is visible through the jump in rank from 31st in 2014 and tenth in 2020.

The list has been prepared by assessing performances of countries of European Union and 57 other countries. The categories used for reference are greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, renewable energy, energy use, and climate policy. The countries assessed in the list are collectively responsible for about 90 per cent of the global GHG emissions. China, being the biggest current emitter of GHG, was ranked 33rd in the list. The largest historical polluter, the United States of America, appeared at the bottom of the list.

Sweden achieved the fourth rank, but none of the countries assessed were able to secure a rank between first and third. According to the index, not a single country has performed well enough in all the four categories. The report also establishes that none of the countries are on the path to meet their Paris Agreement commitment which involved keeping global warming increase below 2ºC by the end of the century. The CCPI covering the year 2020 reveals that only two countries from among the list of G20 nations, the United Kingdom and India, are among the high rankers in the index. In reference to the countries at the bottom of the index, which included the US, Saudi Arabia and Russia, Stephan Singer, Senior Advisor at global energy policies of CAN, said that they are among the highest carbon polluters and the highest energy consumers. He added that none of these countries have any useful federal climate policy to reduce carbon pollution.

LMC issues ₹200 crore Municipal Bonds

MUMBAI: At the traditional bell-ringing ceremony on December 2, the Lucknow Municipal Corporation (LMC) listed bonds worth ₹200 Crores on the Bombay Stock Exchange, in the presence of Yogi Adityanath, Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh. LMC has issued bonds worth 100 crores with a greenshoe option of up to 100 crores with a tenure of 10 years.

Water supply project to be launched in Tamil Nadu

MADURAI: Edappadi K Palaniswami, Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, is all set to launch a water supply project worth ₹1,295 crore under Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) scheme. The project would draw almost 12.5 crore litres of water from Mullaperiyar reservoir and will act as a boon for residents of the city who face water shortage.

New Zealand declares climate emergency

WELLINGTON: Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister of New Zealand, declared "climate emergency" on December 2. She cited findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change which stated, "To avoid more than 1.5 degree Celsius rise in global warming, emissions would need to fall by around 45 per cent from 2010 levels by 2023 and reach zero by around 2050."

Fuel for business is innovation culture

NEW DELHI: A report by Microsoft and International Data Corporation (IDC) stated that amid the COVID-19 pandemic, organisations have increased the potential of innovation by 4 per cent by improving the innovation culture. Rajiv Sodhi, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Microsoft India, said that innovation is no longer an option but a necessity and the recent crisis has shown the importance of transformation to innovate and emerge stronger.

First facial tech tracker launched

NEW DELHI: Internet Freedom Foundation announced the launch of India's first tracker for facial systems. The project intends to quickly identify criminals by gathering existing data from different databases like passport database, Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and systems and other databases available with police or different departments.

Collaboration to better India's highways

NEW DELHI: To make India's highways world-class, 19 Indian Institutes of Technology, 26 National Institutes of Technology and 190 other reputed engineering colleges across India have collaborated with National Highways Authority of India. Under this initiative, each institute will adopt a highway nearby and exchange notes with the NHAI on the latest innovations and new technologies in constructing and maintaining highways.

Portal launched for I-cards for transgenders

NEW DELHI: The Government of India launched a national online portal to help members of the transgender community in applying for an identity card. The applicants can get their I-cards without having to visit any office. Certificates and I-cards, after being issued, can be downloaded from the portal itself.

KITE in list of best HRD models

THIRUVANATHAPURAM: Kerala's KITE (Kerala Infrastructure and Technology for Education) grabbed the spot in the list of Best Models in Human Resource Development (HRD) released by NITI Aayog. KITE's efforts towards enabling internet connectivity and e-learning for kids during the pandemic were greatly appreciated.

Abhayam project launched to ensure women safety

VIJAYWADA: The Government of Andhra Pradesh launched the Abhayam project, aimed at improving security of women and children while travelling in public transport vehicles. The government aims to equip 5,000 vehicles with the tracking and IoT devices by February 1, 50,000 vehicles by July 1, and one lakh vehicles by November next year.

Unified development rules introduced in Maharashtra

MUMBAI: The Government of Maharashtra has brought out unified development control rules for all municipal corporations, councils and nagar panchayats in the entire state except Mumbai and some neighbouring areas. The standardised rules have been introduced to leave little or no space for misinterpretation of real estate construction laws.

Delhi among world's best cities

NEW DELHI: Delhi, the national capital of India, is the only Indian city to be featured among the 100 best cities across the world and has been ranked 62nd in the list. Delhi has improved its position from 81st to 62nd since last year.

SDG Investor map launched

NEW DELHI: Laying out 18 investment opportunities areas (IOAs), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Invest India launched Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Investor Map for India. The UNDP said that these IOAs will help India push the needle forward on sustainable development.

Heavy rain engulfed Andhra

HYDERABAD: Andhra Pradesh recorded rainfall of 191.8mm, which was the heaviest rain spell ever recorded in October month in Hyderabad. The incessant rain led to flooding of over 20,000 houses, water-logging in the whole city, and killed over 50 people. The government had decided to provide a compensation of ₹5 lakh each to family members of those who died in the deluge.

Black spots in Bengaluru getting cleaned

BENGALURU: The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagar Palike is expending approximately ₹1,200 crore to collect garbage, dispose it correctly and clean the black spots around the city. These spots are found along the roads because of the auto tippers who stop in these stretches to transfer the garbage, and due to the ignorant residents who dump their waste where the garbage is piled up.

Disquieting rise in sea level can displace millions
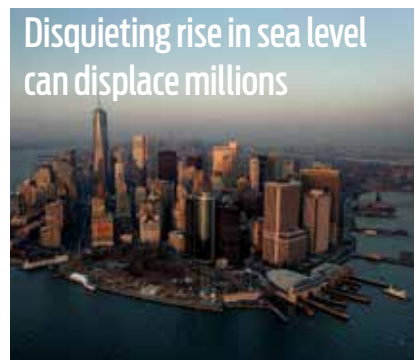
NEW DELHI: Referring to satellite data from the European Space Agency showing that on an average, there has been 3 milimetre rise in mean global sea level since 1993, Madhavan Rajeevan, Secretary, Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES), Government of India, said that rising sea levels, owing to global warming, is a threat to the millions of people living in the coastal regions.

Millions to upgrade highways in Maharashtra

MUMBAI: Government of India and Asian Development Bank jointly signed a $177 million loan to improve 450 kilometres of state highways and major district roads in Maharashtra. The project will enhance connectivity between urban and rural areas in the state, easing mobility of rural communities to better access to job opportunities and other services.

GHI finds India undernourished

NEW DELHI: The annual Global Hunger Index report, released by Concern Worldwide and Welthungerhilfe, ranks India 94 out of 107 countries. India has the worst level of child stunting and child wasting, which reflects acute and chronic undernutrition. India's GHI score is 27.2, where 0 is the best possible score and 100 is the worst.

$300 million loan by ADB for development

JAIPUR: A loan of $300 million was approved by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to develop secondary towns of Rajasthan. ADB said that the loan has been sanctioned to improve water supply, sanitation infrastructure and services in towns of Rajasthan. The project will provide economic assistance to women and weaker groups through skill training, various internships and awareness activities.

Climate change behind natural disasters

NEW DELHI: A report by United Nations (UN) established that climate change is the biggest factor behind doubling in the number of natural disasters in the past 20 years. UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction stated that 4,212 major natural disasters were recorded between the years 1980 and 1999, meanwhile, the number of natural disasters between 2000 and 2019 stands at 7,348, which far outstrips the previous two decades' figures.

India third most disaster-prone

NEW DELHI: A report by the United Nation Office for Disaster Risk Reduction ranked India third on the list of countries recording the highest number of natural disasters in the last 20 years. Findings of the study state that such disasters have caused the loss of lives of around 1.2 million people and have affected around 4 billion.

Cycle for Change by NDMC

NEW DELHI: The New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) launched an initiative, 'NDMC Cycle4Change' - a 6 km pilot corridor dedicated for cycle rides in New Delhi area. The corridor stretches from India Gate to Jor Bagh Metro station via Lodhi Garden. E-bike, scooters and motorcycles are prohibited on cycle tracks to ensure safety of cyclists.

Aim to make India AI global hub: Modi

NEW DELHI: At the inauguration of the Responsible AI for Social Empowerment (RAISE) 2020 Summit, Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India, said that the Government of India aims to become a "global hub" for artificial intelligence (AI) through technology-based learning and skilling for workforce and students. He emphasised that AI should be used responsibly and the world must be protected against its weaponisation by non-state actors.

Telangana awarded Swachh Bharat award third time in a row

HYDERABAD: The state of Telangana was the only state in India to receive the Swachh Bharat award for the third time in a row. Karimnagar district was placed at the third spot in the 'districts' category.

Look of India's first Regional Rapid Train unveiled

NEW DELHI: National Capital Region Transport Corporation unveiled the look of India's first Regional Rapid Transit System train which is planned to operate between Delhi and Meerut. The first look and design of the semi-high speed rail was unveiled on September 25.

The 82 kilometre-long transit system will reduce travel time from 3-4 hours to less than an hour and act as a relief for those travelling daily for work from Meerut and Ghaziabad to Delhi and back.

Kerala awarded for controlling non-communicable diseases

TRIVANDRUM: Kerala was awarded by the United Nations for its "outstanding contribution" towards controlling and preventing non-communicable diseases. K K Shailaja, Minister of Health and Family Welfare, Government of Kerala, dedicated the award to health and other frontline workers of the state for their continuous support and hard work, even during the COVID pandemic.

AIILSG and EU launch the project 'Girl Power'

RANCHI: AIILSG & the European Union (EU) launched the Girl Power project on September 15 to further support capacity building of civil society organisations working in the area of women empowerment in Jharkhand. The project aims to support and empower 5,000 marginalized women in the area.

Andhra Pradesh ends up at the bottom in Literacy Rate

NEW DELHI: Data from a report on education by National Statistical Office placed Kerala on top and Andhra Pradesh at the bottom of the list based on their literacy rates. Top three performers were Kerala (96.2 per cent), Delhi (88.7 per cent), Uttarakhand (87.6 per cent).

All cities in Punjab, Haryana declared ODF by MoHUA

CHANDIGARH: In a first, all urban areas in the Indian states of Haryana and Punjab had been declared open defecation free (ODF), according to a statement by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), Government of India.

India ranks in top 50 in the Global Innovation Index

NEW DELHI: Global Innovation Index had brought India to the list of top 50 countries for the first time. Moving up four places to the 48th rank, India remained at the top position amongst central and south Asian nations. According to the list, while the top positions have remained stable, the overall rankings show a gradual 'eastward shift in the locus of innovation' as Asian economies like China, India and the Philippines have moved up considerably over the years.

Kerala records highest downpour in two decades

TRIVANDRUM: Kerala witnesses around 245 millimetre (mm) of rainfall every year in the month of September. However, the state had recorded around 568 mm of rainfall this year. The monsoon brought around 11 per cent extra rainfall and has resulted in the filling up of all dams in Kerala. Due to the situation, around five teams were stationed by the National Disaster Response Force in Nilambur, Thrissur, Munnar, Kozhikode and Wayanad.

CETPs in Delhi functioning at only 20-22% of their capacity

NEW DELHI: Delhi is home to a total of 13 Common Effluent Treatment Plants (CETPs). During a meeting of the Central Monitoring Committee, these 13 CETPs were found to be operating at only 20-22 per cent of their total capacity.

India's first Water Taxi to begin operations

ALAPPUZHA: Kerala has launched the first of its kind water taxi service of the State Water Transport Department (STWD). After feasibility study was done on the vehicle, SWTD ordered four such boats to use them as taxi for public service. It is a diesel powered vehicle which will carry 10 passengers at a time and has a maximum speed of 10 nautical miles (35 km) per hour. Every taxi will have three employees.

Kerala titled "Top Performer" in State's Start-up Rankings

NEW DELHI: Government of India released the Start-up Rankings. Kerala, along with Karnataka, was recognised as the "Top Performer" for having a strong start-up environment. The state won the title second time in a row.

Delhi government launches new EV policy

NEW DELHI: The Government of Delhi has issued the Delhi Electric Vehicle Policy 2020 to boost the adoption of electric vehicles (EVs) in the national capital. The Policy has been introduced as the scheme launched by the central government was not successful in achieving its goals. The policy is valid for three years and aims to speed up the pace of EV adoption, primarily in the category of two-wheelers, public and shared transport vehicles and goods carriers. It plans to boost the adoption of battery electric vehicles (BEVs) so that they make up 25 per cent of all new vehicle registrations by the year 2024. Financial incentives, tax and fee waivers, charging and swapping infrastructure establishment, job creation, battery cycling ecosystem and the creation of a non-lapsable 'State EV Fund' are all part of the new EV Policy.

Delhi to increase green cover to 25%

NEW DELHI: The Delhi Government has set an ambitious goal to increase the green cover of the city from 22 per cent to 25 per cent over the next three years. According to the latest India State of Forest Report published in 2019, Delhi's green cover, including forest and tree cover, is currently 324 sq km or 21.9 per cent of the total area. In 2017, it stood at 305.4 sq km, or 20.6 per cent.

Indian railways aims to reduce carbon emissions to zero

NEW DELHI: Piyush Goyal, Minister of Railways, said that by 2030, Indian Railways will achieve zero carbon emissions. It carries nearly 8 billion passengers every year and it will be the world's first railways of this scale to go green.

Mental health impacted due to COVID-19: WHO

GENEVA: Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General, World Health Organization, on August 28, said that the mental health of millions of people has been impacted due to lack of social interaction during the COVID-19 pandemic and has increased risk for those living in care houses and psychiatric institutions.

India's longest ropeway inaugurated in Assam

GUWAHATI: The longest river ropeway in India, with a length of 1.82 km, connecting Guwahati and North Guwahati over the Brahmaputra River in Assam, was inaugurated on August 24. The ropeway will cross Urvashi Island and the travelers will also see Umananda Temple on Peacock Island.

NGT directs installation of 175 air quality monitoring system

NEW DELHI: NGT directed the Central Pollution Control Board to monitor the installation work by holding periodical online meetings with the Chairman/Member Secretaries of state pollution control boards and other relevant authorities. The project was to be completed within six months.

DUSIB to provide free education for children residing in night shelters

NEW DELHI: The Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board said that in order to educate children, the Board is planning on engaging volunteer teachers. Nearly 1,000 children aged up to eight years stay with their parents in these 32 night shelters.

Delhi government sets target to meet supply gap of water

NEW DELHI: The Delhi Government has set a new target for itself of meeting the demand-supply gap of water in the city in the next three years. According to officials, various water augmentation projects are being expedited keeping this aim in mind. The city needs an average of 1,150 million gallons of water per day.

43% of schools worldwide lack access to water, soap: UN

JOHANNESBURG: The United Nation estimates that 43 per cent schools worldwide do not have access to water for basic hand-washing. According to the report by the World Health Organization, more than one-third of such children worldwide are in sub-Saharan Africa.

Uttarakhand initiates set up of six waste-to-electricity plants

DEHRADUN: Madan Kaushik, Minister for Urban Development of Uttrakhand, has asked officials to draw up a comprehensive plan for the establishment of six waste-to-energy plants. The plants will be built in Roorkee, Rudrapur, Kashipur, Haldwani, Rishikesh and Kotdwar.

Air pollution shortened life expectancy by 5.2 years

NEW DELHI: According to Air Quality Life Index, Energy Policy Institute, University of Chicago, air pollution has reduced the average life expectancy of Indians and found that, life expectancy would increase by 5.2 years if pollution is reduced in accordance with World Health Organization guidelines.

Britain to have 30 million EVs by 2050

LONDON: According to National Grid Pls's Electricity System Operator unit, the number of electric vehicles on Britain's roads is expected to reach 30 million in the next 20 years. Replacing gas boilers with heat pumps is also part of the 'zero-emissions' plan.

IIT Kanpur startups develop a water quality testing device

KANPUR: Indian Institute of Technology-Kanpur incubated startups, Earthface Analytics and Kritsnam Technologies had developed a device, "PADMAVATI", for monitoring water quality. The colorimetric test strip monitors water quality by screening several critical water quality parameters in less than two minutes.

Over 1.60 lakh HCF in India operate without authorisation

NEW DELHI: Central Pollution Control Board had told the National Green Tribunal that of the total 2,70,416 healthcare facilities in the country, only 1,10,356 facilities have obtained authorisation from CPCB under the Bio-medical Waste Management Rules, 2016.

EESL, NDMC set up New Delhi's first EV charging plaza

NEW DELHI: State-run Energy Efficiency Services Limited, in collaboration with the New Delhi Municipal Council, set up Delhi's first public electric vehicle charging plaza. The plaza, situated at Chelmsford Club in New Delhi, deployed five EV chargers of different specifications.

Google partners with CBSE to promote online education

NEW DELHI: Google, on July 13, announced partnership with the Central Board of Secondary Education to offer digital learning modules across schools in India. They will enable the teachers to deliver blended learning using free tools like G Suite for Education, Google Classroom, YouTube and more.

Rajasthan govt bans manual scavenging in the state

JAIPUR: In view of the finding that COVID-19 can spread through sewage, the Government of Rajasthan, in an order dated July 6, prohibited manual scavenging of septic tanks or sewage chambers in the state. Government directed officials to use machines for cleaning tanks.

Frothing in Yamuna, NGT panel sought report

NEW DELHI: The Central Pollution Control Board, Delhi Pollution Control Committee and Industries Commissioner, had been asked to submit a report about the reasons for a sudden froth in the Yamuna River by the National Green Tribunal appointed Yamuna Monitoring Committee.

Dairies, gaushalas to follow pollution norms

PANIPAT: Central Pollution Control Board had directed the Haryana Pollution Control Board to adopt a categorization of dairies and gaushalas. Farms having 15 or more milch animals and located in colonies should obtain permission under the orange category while gaushalas with sick cattle will fall under green.

PM SVANidhi app launched for street vendors

NEW DELHI: The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs launched PM Street Vendor's AtmanirbharNidhi (PM SVANidhi) App on July 18, to bring micro-credit facility for street vendors. It aims to provide a user-friendly interface for lending institutions for processing loan applications of street vendors.

India joins UN Alliance for Poverty Eradication

NEW DELHI: India joined as a founding member of the Alliance for Poverty Eradication of the United Nations, a key move towards Sustainable Development Goal 1. The alliance would serve as a medium for the forum to act towards generating awareness about the growing levels of poverty to various other challenges like world peace, human rights and sustainable development.

Earthquake shakes southern Mexico

MEXICO CITY: A powerful earthquake with a magnitude 7.7 hit Mexico's southern Oaxaca region on June 23, killing at least five people, swaying buildings and causing thousands to evacuate onto the streets. Authorities also reported a power outage throughout the state's capital and damages to the exterior of a hospital, churches, bridges, and highways in Oaxaca.

UNICEF on children's lives upended

NEW DELHI: A report by the United Nations Children's Fund revealed that the pandemic could push an additional 120 million children in South Asia into poverty. It said that immunization, nutrition and other vital health services have been severely disrupted due to the pandemic, potentially threatening the lives of young children and mothers.

200 million euro agreement to fight COVID-19

NEW DELHI: India and France signed an agreement under which both the countries committed 200 million euros in a bid to increase the state and central government's capacities to support the most vulnerable people in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis.

DRDO'S device to disinfect PPEs

NEW DELHI: The Defence Research and Development Organisation developed a disinfection device named 'Ultra Swachh' which could disinfect a wide range of materials, including Personal Protective Equipment's (PPEs), fabrics, electronic items and others. The device is double layered with a catalytic converter to ensure environment-friendly exhaust.

Rajasthan topped list of COVID management

JAIPUR: Rajasthan had secured the first rank in the COVID-19 management index compiled by the Government of India for 10 states. The judgment included parameters like active cases, recovered cases and mortality rate due to COVID-19 till the month of May.

USA approved $340 million investment loan for Indian Projects

NEW DELHI: The Government of United States has, with the aim of uplifting under-served communities, approved loans and investment worth $340 million for Indian firms and organisations. The projects approved under the initiative will help strengthen health systems, bolster food security and support other impactful development outcomes.

UV-C based kit to disinfect daily use items

CHANDIGARH: The Indian Institute of Technology- Ropar has innovated an ultraviolet (UV-C) based sanitisation kit to disinfect items of daily use like raw vegetables, fruits etc. The UV-C Germicidal Irradiation Technology lightbulb is retrofitted in a trunk, which is lined with aluminium sheets of a certain specification. Item to disinfect is to be placed inside the trunk.

Handbook to ensure safe e-learning

HYDERABAD: National Council of Educational Research and Training collaborated with United Nations Children's Fund to release a handbook, 'Safe Online Learning in Times of Covid-19', which focused on prevention of students from the growing menace of Cyber Bullying and its impact on them and their education.

Free health insurance by Maharashtra Government

MUMBAI: In order to provide relief to the population amidst the COVID-19 outbreak, the Government of Maharashtra announced a free health insurance scheme for all its citizens. Maharashtra became the first state in the country to take such a step.

UN launches 'Closing the Loop' project

BANGKOK: To reduce plastic waste pollution in the rivers and ocean, UNESCAP, in partnership with Government of Japan, has launched a new project called 'Closing the Loop'. To implement this project, innovative technologies will be used such as remote sensing, use of satellite and crowd sourced data application to monitor and detect the pathways and sources of plastic waste entering rivers from urban catchment areas.

Centre identifies four cities as role model

NEW DELHI: The Centre identified four cities- Bengaluru, Chennai, Indore and Jaipur, as 'role models' for other cities in country to handle the coronavirus positive cases. Bengaluru and Chennai were identified as example of large cities that are able to keep a control on mortality rate, while Indore and Jaipur were identified as role models due to their innovative ways of tackling high number of COVID-19 cases.

COVID-19 could push 68 million children deeper into poverty

UNITED NATIONS: A new study by UNICEF and humanitarian organisation 'Save the Children' showed that the total number of children living in poor households across low and middle-income countries could increase by 86 million to reach a total of 672 million by the end of 2020. The economic fallout due to the spread of the pandemic will be responsible for the increase.

Centre deploys 20 'public health teams' to worst hit districts

NEW DELHI: With the number of positive cases rising, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) deployed 'central public health teams' to 20 worst-hit districts from various states for assistance. An official of MoHFW said that the decision was taken by the ministry to aid the various state health departments to manage the outbreak in the hotspots.

PM announces fiscal package

NEW DELHI: In his address to the nation on May 12, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that the central government will be allocating a fund of ₹20 lakh crore. This is to boost the economic conditions of street vendors, small and medium business enterprises, farmers, middle-class, etc, and support economic growth.

Aarogya Setu mandatory for train travel

NEW DELHI: The Ministry of Railways announced that it was mandatory for those travelling via the 'special trains' to install and use the central government's Aarogya Setu app. The government's application provides a means to the users to identify possible risks of infections and notifies if any corona positive patient is in the vicinity of the user.

US withdraws from the WHO

WASHINGTON DC: Donald Trump, President of the United States of America, announced that the country has decided to withdraw from the World Health Organisation. With the decision, the US withdrew all its financial and technical engagements with the international agency, dealing it an unprecedented blow.

EU raises $8.1 billion for COVID-19 vaccine

LONDON: Giving a major boost to finance the research and development for COVID-19 vaccination, the European Union has managed to raise $8.1 billion (€7.4 billion) via the coronavirus pledging conference.

Mortality rate in children to shoot up

NEW DELHI: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has said that the COVID-19 pandemic is shadowed by another crisis as the mortality rate of children could go up by 6,000 daily. It was also observed that maternal deaths could also increase by 56,700 in the coming six months and additional 144,000 deaths could also happen in women of the same age group in developing nations.

Haryana first state to resume bus service

CHANDIGARH: Becoming the first state to enable public transportation post COVID, Haryana government has allowed bus services to resume on select routes to facilitate the movement of people stranded in different districts of the state.

About 38K relief camps across India: GoI to Supreme Court

NEW DELHI: Ajay Kumar Bhalla, Union Home Secretary, informed the Supreme Court that the Government of India (GoI) has set up 37,978 relief camps combined in all the states and union territories that are occupied by 14.3 lakh people as mentioned in an affidavit filed earlier on April 12.

Remdesivir fails first test against coronavirus: Reports

NEW DELHI: Gilead Sciences Inc's recently announced one of the world's first experimental coronavirus drug. However, according to draft documents published accidentally by the World Health Organisation (WHO), the drug has failed its first randomized clinical trial. The Chinese trial showed that the antiviral Remdesivir did not improve patients' condition or reduce the pathogen content in their bloodstream.

Alappuzha turns boats into isolation centre

ALAPPUZHA: In a bid to increase isolation beds for the patients in Alappuzha district, the district administration decided to convert bedrooms in the houseboats into isolation rooms. According to G. Sudhakaran, Public Works Minister, 2,000 isolation beds were set up in houseboats.

Schools to not charge fees/dues for 3 months: Gehlot

JAIPUR: Ashok Gehlot, Chief Minister, Rajasthan, instructed all private schools in the state to not charge any dues or advance fees for three months amid the nationwide lockdown. Gehlot said that the names of students will not be struck off the rolls on account of non-payment of dues/fees.

Telangana imposed ban on spitting in public places

HYDERABAD: In a bid to tackle spread of COVID-19, the Telangana state government issued a government order on April 08, banning spitting of any chewable non-tobacco or tobacco product or sputum in any public area.

Wear masks or pay fine

SURAT: Four cities in Gujarat - Surat, Ahmedabad, Rajkot and Vadodara, have made it compulsory for people to wear masks in public places. An order issued under the Epidemic Diseases Act stated that those caught without wearing a mask in public places in these cities will be fined ₹5000.

Indian airports plan new norms before resuming operations

NEW DELHI: Airports in India planned policies on how to function after they resumed operations in the post-lockdown period amid unusual business conditions. New airport policies include social distancing norms and sanitation stands at regular intervals across the airports, among other COVID-19 safety measures.

1 COVID positive can infect 406 people: Study

NEW DELHI: A study by Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has found that a novel coronavirus infected person can infect 406 people in 30 days if preventive measures like social distancing and lockdown are not implemented, said Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

Study suggest novel coronavirus dies at 70ºC
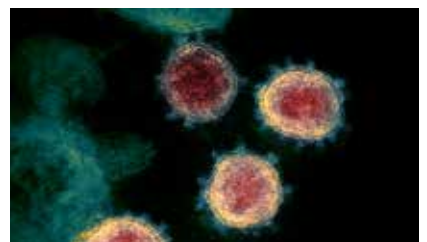
NEW DELHI: A study, published in medical journal The Lancet Microbe, suggests that novel coronavirus can be killed in extreme heat but it takes 14 days for its death at room temperature. A team from Hong Kong University studied the characteristics of the virus and about how long it takes for household disinfectants, bleach, and soap to kill the virus.

Rajasthan police delivered food amid Lockdown

JAIPUR: In a bid to control the coronavirus pandemic, Chief Minister of Rajasthan had put the state under complete lockdown. However, considering the difficulty of the local public in procuring daily supplies, the CM has also announced that the poor and needy can contact the Rajasthan Police Department if they are in need of food or any other emergency services.

Chhattisgarh government takes all steps to ensure delivery of essential services

RAIPUR: Chhattisgarh has invoked the ESMA Act 1968 in the wake of the nationwide lockdown imposed due to the spread of COVID-19. The Act allows the state government to bring all government and private hospitals under its jurisdiction during the time of disaster in order to ensure maintenance of all health related & essential services.

Door to door corona awareness campaigns in Tamil Nadu

CHENNAI: In wake of the coronavirus pandemic, S P Velumani, Minister for Municipal Administration, Rural Development and Implementation of Special Programme, Tamil Nadu, instructed the district administrations and city corporations of the state to begin door-to-door awareness campaigns covering every corner of the city.

21-day nationwide lockdown announced across India

NEW DELHI: Following the Prime Minister's address where he issued a 21-day nationwide lockdown to curtail the spread of the deadly coronavirus, the Ministry of Home Affairs issued a set of detailed guidelines that are to be implemented for the time period. During the 21-day lockdown, there was a complete ban on exiting homes.

GoI sets up 11 empowered groups

NEW DELHI: In a bid to ensure a smooth transition back from the coronavirus shutdown, the Government of India, on March 29, informed 11 empowered groups to develop plans and suggestions to put the economy, healthcare back on track in the shortest possible time.

Mobile hand wash facilities developed in Andhra

AMRAVATI: Given the increase in the total number of corona positive cases in the state, the Andhra Pradesh Government has decided to set up mobile hand wash equipment in various parts. Due to the sudden lockdown, there is low stock of hand sanitisers.

TMC conducted door-to-door survey to detect corona patients

MUMBAI: The Thane Municipal Corporation (TMC) conducted a door-to-door survey in all the residential societies under its jurisdiction to check any symptoms of the coronavirus in the locals. Those who showed any signs of illness or were under home isolation and were geo-tagged for ease of identification.

Highest number of coronavirus positive cases in USA

WASHINGTON: Overtaking countries like China and Italy, the United States of America became the country with the highest number of COVID-19 infection cases. Johns Hopkins University data showed that the total number of cases in the US spiked to 85,663, after more than 16,000 cases were reported on March 26.

RSRTC buses transport migrant workers to their homes

JAIPUR: Thousands of daily wage workers were left stranded on the roads, unable to head home due to no transportation services being operational during the lockdown. Seeing the helplessness of those affected most by the lockdown, Rajasthan government had instructed to press state transport buses into action to transport migrant workers back to their homes.

Gujarat Government steps up sanitation drive

AHMEDABAD: The Government of Gujarat conducted a sanitation drive across various parts of Ahmedabad to prevent spread of coronavirus. As part of the sanitation drive, buses were disinfected by sanitation workers along with various public spaces across the city.

States use DMF funds for relief during coronavirus

JAIPUR: The coronavirus pandemic has caused a global economic slowdown. To mitigate this, Nirmala Sitharaman, Minister of Finance, Government of India, announced that state governments in India can use District Mineral Foundation funds for medical testing, screening and providing of health services.

Pune NGO transforms dump to forest

PUNE: A collaboration of retired soldiers and a Pune- based NGO Green Thumb beautified the one kilometer stretch of the Bairobha Nallah (Canal) stretch from Sopanbaug to Anant Talkies. The group was successful in converting the city's filthiest spot into an urban forest.

UNESCO awards WHC to Walled city of Jaipur

JAIPUR: The walled city of Jaipur has been awarded the World Heritage Certification by Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO. Azoulay presented the certificate to Shanti Dhariwal, Minister of Urban Development and Housing, Rajasthan, saying that it was truly an honor to visit Jaipur.

Hubbali-Dharwad BRTS system running

HUBBALLI: Venkaiah Naidu, Vice President of India, inaugurated the Hubbali-Dharwad Bus Rapid Transit System (BRTS) project in Karnataka. The project has been in the work for the past seven years and will ensure a better public transport option for people and ultimately encourage the people to prevent using their own vehicles.

Black carbon melting Gangotri

DEHRADUN: A study released by the Dehradun-based Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology has revealed that the concentration of black carbon on the Gangotri Glacier has doubled in the last few years.

"It is a cause for concern as tourism in Uttarakhand is affecting the glacier's geology," said Dr Negi, scientist at the Institute.

HP to achieve 30 per cent forest cover

SHIMLA: The Government of Himachal Pradesh is targeting a 30 per cent increase in the state's total forest cover by 2030. The authorities will reach the set target by incorporating public movement. They also implemented HP Forest Ecosystem Climate Proofing Project in various districts, a project worth ₹310 crore.

Multipurpose card by BMRCL

BENGALURU: The Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited plans to install Automatic Fare Collection Systems on trial basis at stations. The card will allow commuters in Bangalore to use multiple modes of transport like metro and buses run by the BMTC using a single card.

Jan 2020 warmest in recorded history

PARIS: European Union's climate monitoring system has reported that the month of January 2020 was the warmest January on record globally. The average measured European temperature was 3 degrees Celsius above the average of Januarys of 1981 to 2010.

Parts of Europe hit with Storm 'Ciara'

LONDON: Parts of Europe and the United Kingdom faced hurricane-level winds which were battering the region. The National Weather agency of UK termed the hurricane as storm Ciara which was expected to bring winds with speed as high as 145 km/hr along with heavy rains.

Freeports to increase trade after Brexit

LONDON: Britain is planning to boost up its economy by including the concept of 'Freeports' or free trade zones in its trade policy. The government is planning to establish 10 freeports at spots in sea, air and rail. Freeports are areas where imported goods can be held or processed free of customs duties before being exported again.

Heavy torrential rainfall in Australia

SYDNEY: In a major relief for Australia, heavy torrential rains helped in dousing many of the widespread wildfires across the country. Sydney received 7 inches of rain between Sunday and Monday, highest in a day since 1992, according to the Bureau of Meteorology.

SDMC gets fully automated car parking system

NEW DELHI: The South Delhi Municipal Corporation (SDMC), on Thursday, January 2, inaugurated the area's first fully automated tower car parking facility near the Green Park metro station. The move was made in order to reduce traffic congestion due to unregulated car parking in Yusuf Sarai Market.

Demark's 50% electricity consumption from wind

COPENHAGEN: Denmark has set a new milestone in the renewable energy sector as the country sourced almost half of its electricity consumption from wind power in 2019. The record can be attributed to the country's steep cost reductions and improvement in offshore technology.

Goa to set up state's first plastic recycling plant

PANAJI: Burdened by the massive problem of plastic waste in the state, the Government of Goa has planned to set up a plastic waste recycling plant that could convert plastic waste into value added byproducts.

VMC sets up night shelter for women

VIJAYAWADA: Vijayawada Municipal Corporation established three night shelters at different places across the city. There are now seven night shelters across the city. Among the three new shelters, two are temporary and one is permanent and caters only to women.

W&CD Ministry, Punjab makes website 'Divyang' friendly

CHANDIGARH: The Government of Punjab has made the official website of Social Security, Women and Child Development Ministry 'Divyang' friendly. The website, http//:sswcd.punjab.gov.in, will help 'Divyang' people to access information more easily than before with the help of features like screen reader and magnifying tools.

Delhi gets its 1st smog tower

NEW DELHI: Delhi's first smog tower became operational on January 3 at the Central market, Lajpat Nagar. The tower was inaugurated by Gautam Gambhir, Member of Parliament, East Delhi. The tower sucks in the polluted air and pumps out clean, filtered air.

Shah lays foundation stone for Delhi Cycle Walk

NEW DELHI: The National Capital will soon be getting a dedicated green corridor for cyclists and pedestrians – 'Delhi Cycle Walk'. Amit Shah, Minister of Home Affairs, laid the foundation of the project on January 6. The Delhi Cycle Walk will be a 200 km long stretch developed through the ridges and green covers of Delhi.

Waste-to-energy plant to come up in Mohali

CHANDIGARH: Captain Amarinder Singh, Punjab CM, permitted building of a 7 MW waste-to energy plant in Mohali. The waste-to energy plant would generate energy from 600 tonnes of waste per day collected from Mohali and Patiala and would be a significant contribution to the implementation of the SAPCC.

₹75 crore water supply scheme inaugurated in Shimla

SHIMLA: The lift water supply scheme Rom Chaba commenced on January 3, as Jai Ram Thakur, Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh, inaugurated the ₹75 crore scheme. Thakur also laid the foundation stone of the water supply scheme, costing ₹ 406-crore, for Shimla from the Sutlej River.

EV charging stations to be installed in Chandigarh

CHANDIGARH: With the aim of encouraging and expanding the use of electric vehicles in India, the central government approved the installation of a total of 70 charging stations in Chandigarh. Under the scheme, a total of 2,636 new charging stations will be set up in 62 cities in 24 states and union territories.

CCTVs installed in UPSRTC buses

LUCKNOW: With the aim of improving the cleanliness of its bus service, the Uttar Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation will install CCTVs in every bus depot under its jurisdiction and follow the mobile app-based monitoring system.

India prepares for COVID-19 vaccination drive

NEW DELHI: As India is gearing up for vaccination drive, the government of India has announced that it will deploy its vast election machinery to deliver 60 crore doses of Covid vaccines to 30 crore Indians. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) issued a draft of standard operating procedures (SOP) to all the states and union territories and stated that at least 100 people should get vaccinated each day at every site. If sufficient resources are available, then each site can vaccinate upto 200 people per day. People will be monitored at the site for 30 minutes after administering the shots. The SOP mentioned that a vaccination site ought to have three rooms or areas including waiting room, vaccination room and observation room.

Dr VK Paul, Niti Aayog member and head of National Expert Group on Covid-19 vaccination, said that the central government has lined up cold storage facilities with temperatures between 2 to 8 degrees Celsius and that the capacity of the syringes and needles have also been built up to the store. According to the plan developed by MoHFW, the coronavirus vaccine will be first given to health care workers, frontline workers, and people above 50 years.

After this, vaccines are to be given to those who are below 50 years of age and are suffering from a chronic critical illness. And then the rest of the population will be given COVID-19 vaccine, whenever it will be ready for public use, keeping in view the spread and availability of the disease.

The government is planning on identifying those above 50 years of age based on the voter list prepared in the Lok Sabha elections and assembly elections. The SOP by MoHFW also mentioned that the beneficiaries of the vaccine will be tracked through a digital platform called Co-WIN (Covid Vaccine Intelligence Network). All information on this platform will be updated in real time. The central government has asked the states to maintain 360-degree comprehensive communication and social mobilization strategy to address the challenges surrounding the vaccine rollout, its progress and benefits.

As per the centre's guidelines, healthcare personnels; state and district programme managers; medical officers; vaccinator officers; information, education and communication officers; cold chain handlers; supervisors; data managers; ASHA workers; and Mahila Arogya Samitis will be involved in the vaccination drive after going through training programmes set for them.

Dr Suneela Garg, public health advisor to Indian Council of Medical Research, revealed that various categories of staff will be deployed at the vaccination site, including MBBS, BDS, AYUSH doctors, pharmacists, nurses, auxiliary midwife and medical interns. According to the guidelines, four different vaccination officers will be responsible to handle checking registration status of beneficiaries, verifing documents, crowd management, monitoring of adverse events, and guiding non-registered beneficiaries at each site. She added, "We have to see that there is no myth and misconception. Therefore, medical officers and nurses will be giving the vaccine, rest of them will be doing other activities."

The monumental task of training healthcare workers for the drive has started in the national capital as around 3500 health workers have been identified for the process. According to the government of New Delhi, 1.8 lakh to 2.25 lakh health care workers will be vaccinated in the first phase of the drive, for which 609 cold chain points have been identified in all the top hospitals and Mohalla clinics. Apart from the health department, Delhi government is coordinating with other ministeries, municipal corporations, panchayati raj, urban minister body and other departments for the vaccination programme. The priority during vaccination drive in Delhi will be given to around 1,80,000 healthcare workers.

Managing waste in changing climate
Challenges & Solutions

All India Institute of Local Selg Government, in collaboration with 3R Waste Foundation and Urban Update, are organising a series of webinars on waste management. The webinars are aimed at increasing dialogue between policy makers, experts and the public on the ways of managing all types of waste in a more responsible and environmentally cleaner way.

The twentieth edition of E-Dialogue series was held on the topic 'Waste Management and Climate Change'. Managing and segregation of waste is a big challenge, especially in the time of a pandemic. There are various policies and guidelines underlined for waste management and climate action but implementation of these provisions is not effective enough on the ground level.

To discuss this issue, Urban Update invited an illustrious panel of experts including Prof Sunil Herat, Associate Professor (Waste Management), Griffith University, Australia; Dr Ram Tiwaree, Economic Affairs Officer, Environment and Development Division, United Nations Economics and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP); Dr Suneel Pandey, Director, Environment and Waste Management Division, The Energy and Resource Institute (TERI); Dr Ashwani Luthra, Professor and Former Head, Guru Ramdas School of Planning, Amritsar; and Sajib M Mahanta, Research Ananlyst, Financial Inclusion Improves Sanitation Health (FINISH) Society India. The event was moderated by Dr Kulwant Singh, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), 3R Waste Foundation.

Prof Sunil Herat started the discussion about circular economy approach which is being talked about a lot these days. He stressed upon the need to manage our waste, the volume of which is increasing every day. He added, "Managing waste and climate change through energy efficiency and using renewable energy can address 55 per cent of the emissions, the remaining 45 per cent which is associated with making products is ignored." Applying circular economy approach to this 45 per cent can help in reducing 40 per cent of waste from this sector. He also talked about plastic waste management where only 14 per cent is recycled. Food waste is also a prominent challenge which can be tackled by various methods of circular economy approach. Talking about the role of industries in accepting the circular economy approach, he said that authorities have to show the financial side of the new method. Monetary incentive can only motivate the industries to accept this approach. Moreover, e-waste and disaster waste is an emerging problem in present time and are not considered when we talk about waste management.

Dr Ram Tiwaree continued the dialogue by talking on condition of Asia-Pacific and its contribution to the volume of waste. He said that almost 43 per cent of the waste generated in the region constitutes plastic which is higher than any other sector. He added that almost 60 per cent of the waste in this region in low- and middle-income countries is openly dumped, which is also a big challenge. He also mentioned about greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and that Asia-Pacific contributes almost 60 per cent of the emissions in the world. Shockingly, almost 80 per cent of the GHG emission is from the cities where 3-5 per cent contribution comes from waste sector. He also reinforced the importance of 3R (Recycle, Reuse and Reduce) in managing the waste efficiently. "According to our study, if we process around 1 ton of organic waste by an Integrated Resource Recovery Centre (IRCC), we can reduce almost 0.5-ton of carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions, including other benefits economically", he added. Better waste management can contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) number 11 and 13 of Sustainable Cities and Climate Action.

E-Dialogues 20.0 | Waste Management & Climate Change

Dr Suneel Pandey talked about waste management and its importance as far as smart cities are concerned. He mentioned smart waste management for smart cities with the goal of constructing landfill-free cities which are climate friendly. Components of smart waste management will include smart waste collection and storage, efficient transport, efficient disposal, maximum utilisation, etc. He emphasised upon the integration system of waste produced so as to segregate and manage it in a manner that it also helps in the production of power. This power produced from the waste can add to the productivity of the city as well as aid in the implementation of development policies. He also suggested a second option for the cities which do not need extra power and suggested that they can use it to produce Refused Derived Fuel (RDF) used in industries. He also enlisted the benefits of having landfill-free cities in the form of reduced landfill fires, reduction in uncontrolled methane emissions, creation of green jobs, etc.

Dr Ashwani Luthra shared some insights of his city, Amritsar, in managing the waste through a decentralised approach. He discussed Amritsar's planning in waste management where the authorities divided the city into 8 zones. Garbage collection vehicles are GPS-enabled to ensure maximum efficiency and the disposal is through methods such as pit composting, windrows, mechanical separators, waste-to-energy plants, etc. Dr Luthra said, "We have a vision to make Amritsar, a plastic-free city for which the plastic bags are banned but there are various challenges in realising this target." He also talked about Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, which has become the second cleanest government university in India by adopting measures like the installation of solar panels and its efforts to become a zero waste campus. There are various committees and panels which look after the waste management, student clubs are constituted which provide a fine example of people participation. The methods and planning in Amritsar city

DR ASHWANI DISCUSSED AMRITSAR'S PLANNING IN WASTE MANAGEMENT WHERE THE AUTHORITIES DIVIDED THE CITY INTO 8 ZONES. GARBAGE COLLECTION VEHICLES ARE GPS-ENABLED TO ENSURE MAXIMUM EFFICIENCY AND THE DISPOSAL IS THROUGH METHODS SUCH AS PIT COMPOSTING, WINDROWS, MECHANICAL SEPARATORS, WASTE-TO-ENERGY PLANTS, ETC

present a good example of decentralised approach in waste management and climate action.

Sajib M Mahanta presented his part on a very important issue of sanitary waste management, which is regularly avoided. He said that this is a silent issue in the country, but it adds almost 1,13,000 tonnes of waste annually in India. He said that according to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), incineration is the best method of disposing menstrual waste. However, the problem lies in the temperature at which these incinerators are used. World Health Organisation (WHO) suggests that the temperature should be at 100 degree Celsius and not fulfilling these criteria can result in emission of harmful fumes. He mentioned about a study conducted by him and his team examining menstrual hygiene and waste management in urban regions. The study found that around 68 per cent women used commercially available non-biodegradable sanitary pads which contain almost 90 per cent plastic, including plastic packaging, wings, adhesives, etc. Surprisingly, only two cities in India - Bangalore and Pune, have guidelines for segregating

sanitary waste. He also suggested various solutions in the form of taking up circular economy approach and design based alternatives to the issue.

While answering the question regarding challenges faced by South-Asian cities in managing waste, Dr Suneel said that there should be a greater focus on the governance which is important to achieve the targets. Policy making, financial support and capacity building are some of the methods which are vital on the part of government. Dr Pandey also addressed the same question where he suggested putting a productive pressure on manufacturers to produce climate friendly products which are easier to manage. Dr Luthra reinforced his idea of adopting a decentralised approach while addressing the challenges. He also said that sensitising the public about issues like waste management is equally necessary as public participation is the most effective way to reduce and neutralise the affects of climate change. Sajib suggested the need to better segregate the waste at source which will significantly reduce the cost of transportation and further segregation. ■

Preparedness of ULBs key to mitigate disasters

The National Institute of Disaster Management, in collaboration with All India Institute of Local Self Government, Foundation EMDA Southasia and Urban Update, has started a series of webinars and workshops to deliberate upon the ways and means to improve capacity of all stakeholders for effective disaster response, mitigation techniques and create awareness for efficiently managing disaster related risks.

Globally, the impacts of disaster have risen rapidly over decades affecting almost all sectors in all countries. 700 million people affected annually and losses of over $371 billion in 2011, it impacts individuals, especially the poor households. In India, the migrant labourers and people from the disadvantaged groups suffer the most. In this context, Urban Update organised a webinar on 'Disaster Risks, Mitigation and Sustainable Communities' in order to discuss how urban local bodies (ULBs) can ensure that in the event of a disaster, they are able to handle the situation more efficiently so as to reduce the negative impacts of the disaster. Mihir R Bhatt, Director, All India Disaster Mitigation Institute; Dr Birupaksha Dixit, Indian Coordinator Practical Action participated as speakers at the Webinar. The special address was given by Prof Vinod C Menon, Former Member, National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM). The introductory remarks were given by Gagan Sinha, Secretary General, Foundation EMDA Southasia and Prof Santosh Kumar, Head of Governance and Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction

(G&IDRR), NIDM. The webinar was moderated by Abhishek Pandey, Editor, Urban Update.

Prof Santosh Kumar, in his special address, emphasized on the importance of talking on issues like how our local government can get together with the agencies who are working on disaster risk management, how that capacity flow should be from the national to the state and to the local government, and how public health issues and the disaster risk management can go down to the local level understanding. He talked about inverted pyramid approach where centre should not be thick and big in investment and planning. All the activities should happen at local level where risk exposure is high. He gave the example of Kerala where the disaster preparedness was well planned and hence the floods did not cause a lot of damage.

Prof Menon started by saying that all of us have seen the impacts of COVID-19 and the pronounced effects that a population explosion caused. He talked about the problems of the migrant workers who suffered greatly during the lockdown. "More than 150 million people in the world have been pushed into poverty and deprivation, into malnutrition, into hunger. Something we really need to understand is that in the 15 years between 2015 and 2030, we really don't have the luxury of catching up with the lost development gains which we have tried to achieve in the Millennium Development Goals and also in the first five years of the sustainable development goals." Prof Menon said that education also was greatly affected by the pandemic. There is need to address the issues related to poverty and lack of access to resources, and that is where resilient communities

have to come up. Mentioning about a webinar with fronts from the United States, Italy and China, he said that "politics and economics have taken over the public health and issues of addressing social inequality. Politics and economics are driving us now." He said that the challenge is how we empower communities, especially the vulnerable.

Gagan Sinha talked about the vision of EMDA Southasia and importance of partnership with other organisations for combating disasters like COVID-19 and work efficiently for better preparedness and prevention.

Mihir R Bhatt said that the discussion should go beyond disasters that are traditionally recognised. He went on to say that the ten-point agenda set by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has witnessed a setback due to the pandemic. He said that we cannot mitigate disasters if we can't reimagine about what we are doing. Second important opportunity that is seen and is being worked on is that there is a big gap between the public, social and government initiatives and their operations. A huge gap is seen between the ideas and the implementations. He said that there is opportunity to accelerate and augment with focus on local government.

Dr Dixit, through his presentation, expressed his concern about damages that follow disasters. He explained the difference between urban disasters and natural disasters. Dr Dixit said that urban disasters are majorly man-made. The most vulnerable people in urban areas are people who do not own houses or those live in low-lying areas. Cities can be made safer by encouraging development policies that reduce vulnerabilities and talk about

land use; risk and impact assessment; maintenance of infrastructure; and integration of services. City managers also have to be prepared to cope with emerging situations.

Dr Dixit stressed on the fact that in most of the cities, municipal bodies and ULBs are not aware of the issues mentioned above, and even if they are aware they do not know how to deal efficiently with them. For this, emergency management planning should be undertaken and the entire institutional structure needs to be strengthened. Public education, community based programmes and solutions are also required as community also needs to be educated and prepared to address the issues. Giving the examples of municipal practices of other countries including Philippines, where a portion of their municipal fund is used for preparedness procurement of relief and rescue equipment, he said that India should also have such practices which can prepare people to face the adverse and harsh climatic changes and conditions. He also said that India should also learn from Malaysia's storm water drainage road tunnels to avoid the flooding of roads and houses every rainy season.

He said that the government focuses on relief funding more than resilience building and this issue needs to be addressed. The government also should allow only 70 per cent of the land of the city to be used for building purposes.

While answering a question on how the sectorial loss could be minimized, with special reference to cyclone Fani that hit Odisha last year, Dr Dixit said that the government is working on many projects for minimising disaster effects. He suggested that states which are greatly impacted by disasters on a regular basis should start focusing on building resilience.

Mihir then answered a question as to why authorities are not doing what is necessary for preventing the damage caused to coastal cities every year by saying that focus should be on early warning system which would help the cities to prepare better for the disaster. On this note, Prof Kumar added that the Government of India and the Government of Nepal are considering building infrastructure like water flow systems, which would minimise the damage caused by Bihar's rains.

Prof Menon then informed about the financing instruments that are available to enhance resilience of a city. He said that there is need of insuring our cities' buildings and there is need of opening up the economy. He also said that we need to look at the good practices of other countries and learn from them and come up with innovative ideas. Commenting on the ecosystem approach, Dr Dixit said that it provides multiple benefits. If we successfully control degradation of our ecosystem, we can avoid a number of disasters as it will help the natural ecosystem to prosper. Sinha concluded by saying that good planning of cities and towns is necessary and if something unfortunate is to happen, then a system is needed whereby the gap between the planning and implementation is minimised.

Pandey concluded the webinar by saying that now we have to reimagine our thought process and our policies and plans and implementation, strategies, and how we can reduce damages of disasters. ■

Organisers

WEBINAR

Disaster Risks, Mitigation And Sustainable Communities

December 3, 2020
Thursday

11:00 AM
(Indian Standard Time)

KEYNOTE ADDRESS
Maj. Gen. Manoj K Bindal
Executive Director, NIDM

SPECIAL ADDRESS
Prof. Vinod C Menon
Former Member, NDMA

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS
Mr. Gagan Sinha
Secretary General
Foundation EMDA South Asia

Prof. Santosh Kumar
Head, G&IDRR, NIDM

SPEAKERS
Mr. Mihir R Bhatt
Director, All India Disaster
Mitigation Institute

Dr. Birupakshya Dixit
India Coordinator
Practical Action

MODERATOR
Mr. Abhishek Pandey
Editor
Urban Update

All are most welcome to attend the webinar.
For registration, please visit **https://bit.ly/3o9oo1y**
or scan QR code

For any technical query for attending the webinar, please write to us at **contacturbanupdate@gmail.com** or call
Ashley Paul at + 91 9811511324

Moving ahead in the New Normal

Through the COVID-19 pandemic, people across the world tried to adjust to the multiple changes in their lifestyles. One such change was that of the introduction of Webinars. Seeing that the role of urban development had increased manifold after COVID-19 displayed the shortcomings in the civic services of cities, Urban Update too undertook the initiative of organising webinars to promote dialogue and discussion among key stakeholders of urban development.

As part of this initiative, Urban Update collaborated with numerous organisations and put together a total of 25 webinars as part of five diverse series. These Webinars ranged from transportation to disaster mitigation.

E-DIALOGUES

As part of AIILSG and Urban Update's collaboration, this series of webinars was started. A total of 17 editions have so far been conducted on topics including 'COVID-19 and the Search for a Vaccine' to 'Urbanisation in Independent India'. The panelists for the webinars included eminent dignitaries like Dr Animesh Kumar, Deputy Head (Asia-Pacific), United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction; Dr Sewa Ram, Professor of Transport Planning, School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi; and Vimlendu Jha, Founder, Sweccha India. Covering a wide range of topics from unemployment to the environment, from the National Education Policy to Housing For All, E-Dialogues served as a platform for detailed discussion and deliberation between experts, policy makers and the general public.

MAYORS' DIALOGUE

Under this series, Urban Update, in collaboration with the National Institute of Urban Affairs and AIILSG,

organised a total of two webinars. The main aim of this series was to provide a platform for Mayors from across the country to come together to discuss and share their experiences of handling a pandemic as severe as COVID-19. Panelists for this series included Sanyukta Bharia, Mayor, Lucknow; Sanjeev Bittu, Mayor, Patiala; Dilip Kumar Agasty, Mayor, Durgapur; and Uday Madkaikar, Mayor, Goa. The topic for the first edition was 'Making Cities Pandemic Resilient: The Role of Elected Representatives' and that of the second edition was 'Leadership and Pandemic Response'. Not only did Mayors contribute experience, they also appreciated the concept.

WEBINARS ON WASTE MANAGEMENT

In collaboration with UN-Habitat, United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD), AIILSG, and 3R Waste Foundation, Urban Update organised three webinars under this category. The first two editions of this category – 'Sustainable Solid Waste Management during COVID-19' and 'The Challenges of Plastic Waste Management' were a pre-event of UNCRD's 3R Waste and Circular Economy Forum.

Next in the series – 'Waste Management and Climate Change' focused on how organised and responsible waste management can play a big role in reversing the effects of climate change. Trish Hyde, Director, Plasticity, Australia; and Prashant Lingam, Senior Project Officer, UN Development Programme, India, were some of those who were part of the panel in these three Webinars. The Webinars served as a knowledge-sharing platform for municipal officials.

WEBINARS ON MIGRANTS

For this series, Urban Update collaborated with Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration,

DATA ON WEBINARS
TOTAL WEBINARS – 25
TOTAL REACH – 77,000
TOTAL PARTICIPATION – 4,000
TOTAL SPEAKERS – 133

AIILSG, Indian Institute of Human Settlements and Foundation EMDA Southasia, to organise a total of two webinars on the topics 'Urban Labour Rights and State Response in Time of COVID-19' and 'Affordable Rental Housing for the Urban Poor – Demand, Supply and Management Dynamics'. The panel for these webinars included Prof Ravi S Srivastava, Director, Centre for Employment Studies, Institute for Human Development and Amrit Abhijat, Joint Secretary and Mission Director (Housing For All), Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.

WEBINAR ON DISASTER MANAGEMENT

This is the newest series of webinars and workshops in collaboration with the National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM), AIILSG and Foundation EMDA Southasia. Aimed at increasing awareness among urban local bodies and local governments regarding disaster preparedness, only one edition has been organised so far as part of this series on the topic "Disaster Risks, Mitigation and Sustainable Communities'. Mihir R Bhatt, Director, All India Disaster Mitigation Institute and Dr Birupakshya Dixit, India Coordinator, Practical Action, along with Prof Vinod C Menon, Former Member, National Disaster Management Authority and Prof Santosh Kumar, Head, G&IDRR, NIDM, were part of the panel for this webinar. Thus, Urban Update firmly believes in the power of knowledge sharing and discussion and feels that only when people come together with experts and policy makers can both understand the problems that the other side faces and work on the appropriate solutions they suggest for the same. ■

Female Migrant Labourers require immediate help

All India Institute of Local Self-Government (AIILSG), in collaboration with the National Commission for Women (NCW) and Urban Update, organised a special webinar on the topic 'Migrant Women Workers: Issues and Challenges' to talk about the probkems faced by female migrant labourers, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic

The panel for the Webinar consisted of Pravin Bhardwaj, Consultant, AIILSG; Dr Suchita Krishnaprasad, Former Head, Department of Economics, Elphinstone College, Mumbai; Vijaya Srinivasan, Deputy Director, Ambedkar Institute for Labour Studies, Parel, Mumbai; Dr Sneha Palnitkar, CEO, Waste Management Resource Centre – AIILSG, Mumbai; and Aarya Venugopal, Director (research), Jan Sahas. The webinar was moderated by Abhishek Pandey, Editor, Urban Update.

Each speaker took charge of one of the five sessions of the webinar.

SESSION 1
Understanding the status and current scenario of migrant women labourers in India
Pravin Bhardwaj, Consultant, AIILSG

The first session commenced with an insight into the current situation of migration of women in India. A larger section of women is moving either after they are married or for education. Bhardwaj proceeded with data from various states to explain how internal migration happens across states like Delhi, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Haryana, Punjab and Karnataka, and further how inclusion of women migrants in cities is a necessary step towards sustainable urban development, based on cultural diversity, social cohesion and human rights. He further highlighted the problems and issues faced by women, and the discrimination at every level, from working conditions to wages. He summed up the discussion while highlighting the situation of migrant women laborers in lockdown, during 2020 due to pandemic.

SESSION 2
Various guidelines, laws and missions on migrant woman labourers and identifying the gap in implementation/ monitoring
Dr Suchita Krishnaprasad, Department of Economics Elphinstone College, Mumbai

The session commenced with showing differences of our Preamble, article and laws, and how these define the labour related principles/ laws since independence. Dr Suchita explained various Articles of the preamble and what they portray. Since most the labour laws are part of the Directive Principles of State Policy, these being directive in nature, are only recommendatory in nature. She further talked about the economics of migration and migrants, explaining it with the help of different models like Harris & Todaro model (1970), Arthur Lewis model (1954). She went on to say that we find that the informal sector, which offers an easy entry to new migrants (especially women), largely represents a survival strategy of a pool of workers often pushed out of the lap of rural sector. This was witnessed evidently during the nationwide lockdown imposed due to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Talking about legal alternatives of the current system, she gave

> IT IS EVIDENT FROM GOVERNMENT DATA THAT WOMEN OFTEN LACK ACCESS TO QUALITY SKILL TRAINING. THIS EVENTUALLY RESULTS IN WOMEN BEING LESS PREFERRED IN EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

technology-based solutions, which can ensure timely payment and absence of discrimination for migrant workers. The Government of India has also allotted funds for the labourers and their welfare and their utilisation, although in question, has been depicted in the statistics and statements provided during the Lok Sabha sessions.

SESSION 3
Ways to provide basic necessities and support to migrant woman labourers
Vijaya Srinivasan, Deputy Director, Ambekar Institute for Labour Studies, Mumbai

The third session commenced with an insight into the pressing issues and challenges of migrant woman labourers. Migrants are usually unable to obtain skilling opportunities, so have to start at the lowest job available, and access to banking & financial services is compromised due their lack of proof of identity. Moreover, they are termed outsiders due to language barriers, and fail to avail basic services like healthcare and public facilities.

Vijaya highlighted how different types of women migrants are classified, and unique problems faced by migrant women labourers. She mentioned about the Migrant Support Centers- Core Support Services, which exist in India since a decade. However, they have not been successful in providing the support they were supposed to.

SESSION 4
New avenues, opportunities and innovative ways of skilling of the woman
Dr Sneha Palnitkar, CEO, WMRC - AIILSG, Mumbai

The fourth session began with Dr Palnitkar enlisting the major reasons related to migration of women in our country. She explained how lack of income opportunities and poor living conditions in rural areas contribute to migration. It is also evident from government data that women often lack access to quality skill training. This eventually results in women being less preferred in employment opportunities. While highlighting informal sector workers like the waste pickers and care givers, she said that they need some handholding for improving their skills.

Further talking about new avenues in waste recycling sector, she talked about rules laid down in the Solid Waste Management Rules 2016. She went on to talk about the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship and said that they have also prepared Model Curriculum for Waste Pickers. She continued to then talk about how some jobs are pre-dominantly occupied by women. These included jobs like that of care-givers, nannies, domestic help, street vendors and construction workers. "These professions need serious skilling efforts by the central and state governments in order for us to realise the true potential that women as workers possess," said Dr Palnitkar.

SESSION 5
Monitoring, promoting and protecting migrant woman labourer and labour laws
Aarya Venugopal, Director (Research), Jan Sahas

In the last session, Venugopal showed trends of female migration, from rural to urban areas, and said that there is a steady increase of 50-71 per cent. Rural category of scheduled caste females has seen the biggest shift in migration pattern. Labourers, especially those engaged in construction work, retire by their mid-40s. Construction sector being one of the largest employers of migrant, informal labour, shows that a large number of migrant labourers are unemployed after they are over 40 years of age. This happens mostly because construction companies/contractors believe that older labourers, particularly women, are unable to pick up heavy loads of construction materials like bricks, cement bags etc. The female migrant typologies and intersectionality based on caste, regional differences, age and marital status further divide into three categories: female migrant workers migrating on their own; non-working women migrating to urban areas, usually urban slums; and lastly, women who are left behind by spouses. Based on the categories in which they fall, Jan Sahas organisation provides help and support to these women.

CLOSING CEREMONY
The closing ceremony for the webinar was conducted by Abhishek Pandey. During this, Pandey highlighted the way forward, keeping in mind the points that were raised throughout the Webinar. He said that social and economic exploitation of women in the informal sector must be stopped. Moreover, the government must set up multi-lingual help centres to assist migrants to settle down in the places they migrate to easily. Lastly, Pandey suggested that although the government has worked pro-actively to promote women education, there is still a lot of work that needs to be done. The government must not stop in its march towards women empowerment. ∎

20 LESSONS FOR CITIES FROM 2020

It is no secret that the best lessons are learnt in the worst times. The year 2020 has taught us many lessons. Finally, the year is departing but the lessons learnt should have a far-reaching and deep impact on the way we plan, design and manage our cities

ABHISHEK PANDEY
Editor

The passing year has given us some hope with the news of effective vaccine being made available to people around the world. Now, cities are gearing up to return to normalcy. They must seize the opportunity and plan for a brighter urban future with an eye on the rearview mirror to understand the multi-dimensional impacts of the pandemic, their response and learning.

1. SLOW DOWN
One of the big lessons for humanity this year is to slow down and rethink the priorities. It is true for our urban spaces too. Many cities around the world have started working in this direction by focusing on creating an eco-system that ensures better living conditions for everyone in the city. City leaders need to keep assessing their requirements and priorities regularly. Growth without responsibility is not good enough.

2. NEEDS VERSUS WANTS
Many cities are mimicking the development model of metro cities without assessing their local requirements. Such mistakes do not just result in wasting of resources but also damage the environmental health of urban spaces. Ghost cities of China are one example. Another example could be the expansion of high-cost infrastructure projects in cities, while economical options are available. Metro train project in small cities and the tepid response of locals could be one example. There is no harm in being future-ready and plan for increasing demand but cities must assess their needs and address those issues first which need urgent resolution.

3. A THOUGHT TO DE-GROWTH
'De-growth' is not a mainstream idea, especially in countries which are still developing. If one asks what is prosperity then the obvious answer could be big and bigger economic progress. But the economic and infrastructural progress cannot be infinite on a finite planet. Cities will also have to learn this fundamental fact which was highlighted by the pandemic this year because most of our mighty cities, despite having the best of the resources, collapsed badly.

4. ECO-CONSCIOUS MOVEMENT
Citizens have begun to realize the importance of sustainability after seeing the disastrous impacts of climate change and environmental degradation. Consumers are opting for 'green products' and 'services' w h i c h adopt sustainable practices. Cities can leverage on the progress in this direction to promote sustainable practices in their jurisdiction. This can pave a way for greener and steady-state of our urban spaces despite evolving challenges. This also encourages people to use less disposable items, use cars less, adopt sustainable products, etc.

5. RETHINK OPEN SPACES
When cities were shut down during the lockdown, we came to realize the importance of open spaces in cities. Open spaces include recreational spaces, organized green and other common open spaces (such as floodplains, forest cover) in plain areas, according to the 2014 Urban and Regional Development Plans Formulation and Implementation guidelines. The guidelines suggest a norm of 10-12 square metres of open space per person. Most of our cities, as per their master plans, do not fulfil this criterion. Cities will have to look at this front and plan their development accordingly and ensure better mental and physical health of their citizens.

6. BUILDING RESILIENCE
I don't think after what happened this year, cities need to be reminded of building resilient urban systems to cope with disasters and health emergencies.

7. INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATIONS
The experience of cities in different regions helped in framing policies elsewhere in swiftly responding to the crisis. T h e

innovation and technological tools developed by cities in South Korea, Japan, China, USA, India and other countries assisted people in other parts of the world. Sharing knowledge and resources among cities is essential in the times when a vast majority of the world population will live in cities.

8. ROLE OF LGAS

The role of Local Government Associations and the institutes which enable global knowledge sharing between cities is becoming increasingly important. These institutes shall be promoted and cities must become proactive partners to share their experiences and learn from the innovations of others.

9. IMPROVE COMMUNITY SANITATION STANDARDS

The performance of India in improving its sanitation standards in the last couple of years with its Swachh Bharat Abhiyan has been commendable. Now, it is the time for the cities to make sure that the momentum continues and the people adopt the sanitation practices as a way of their life. This can become possible only when there is a sustained collective effort from the local governments and the local community.

10. CONTRIBUTION OF SANITATION WORKERS

Sanitation workers acted as the frontline warriors and their incredible contribution to society was recognized by one and all. Cities must value their contribution in keeping the cities clean and must frame welfare programs for their well-being. Providing adequate safety gear and equipment in every city should be a top priority.

11. MOBILITY ALTERNATIVES

Urban transport systems help the cities run smoothly. COVID-19 discouraged people to use public transport or shared vehicles. Many people opted for personal vehicles like cars and bikes. Going forward, cities should encourage people to walk and cycle, wherever possible. This will also help in reducing carbon footprint.

12. IMPROVE COMMUNICATION WITH COMMUNITY

Cities always become the first respondents to any kind of crisis. The need to adopt better communication strategies and encourage the local population to be proactive in urban affairs and local policy decision is of great significance. The idea of Swaraj given by Mahatma Gandhi still holds relevance in local urban governance. It was overwhelming to see how local community groups rose to the occasion and helped people in need during the crisis.

13. HOUSING

Housing for All has been on the agenda of the present government. The government also launched the Rental Housing Scheme for the migrant workers after the issues of inadequate facilities for the migrant population surfaced during the lockdown. Improving sanitation facilities and provision of basic civic services in all the colonies is needed to deal with a health disaster like COVID-19.
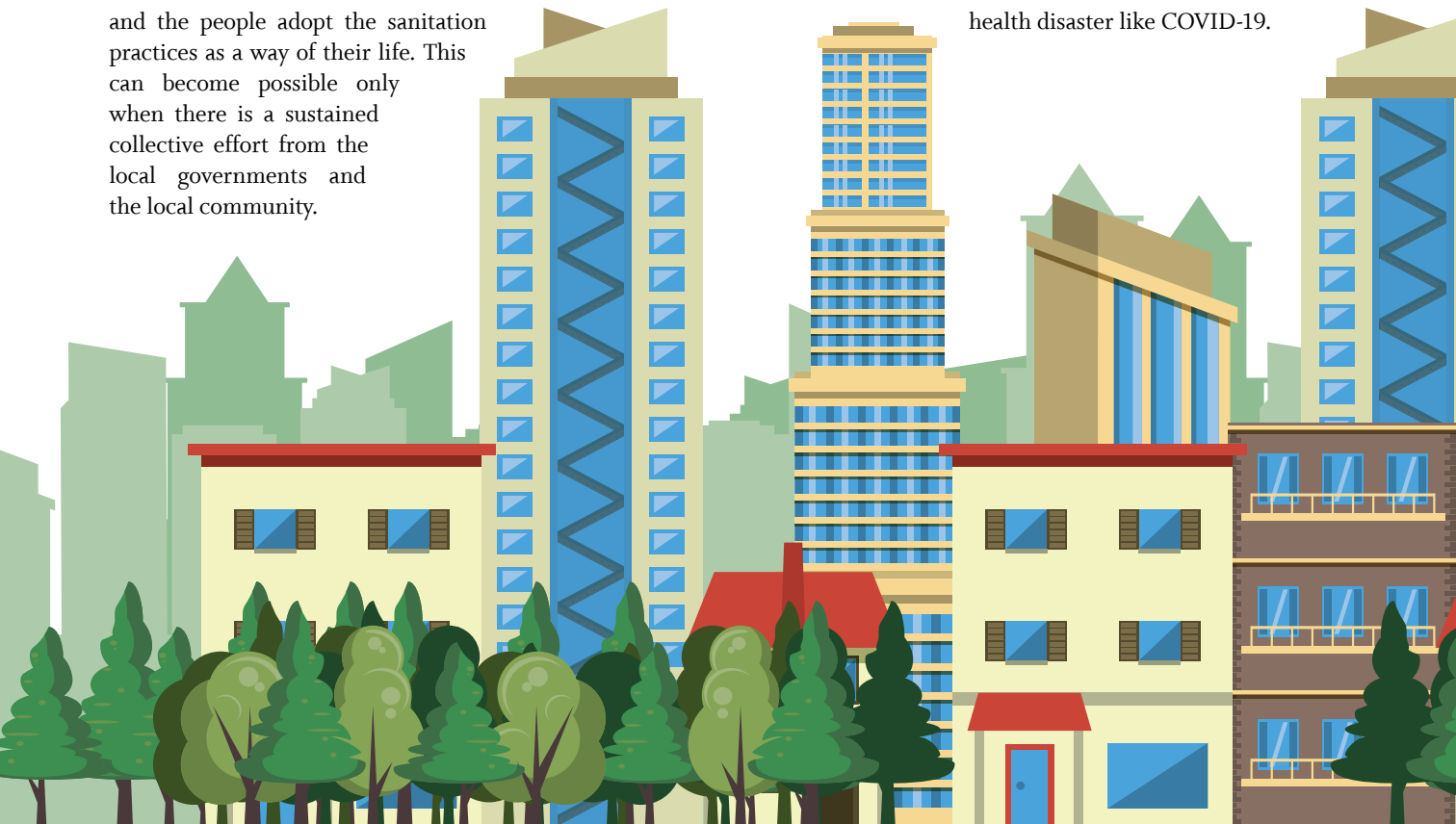
14. VOCAL FOR LOCAL

The mantra given by Prime Minister Narendra Modi is important for various reasons for cities. It not just makes cities self-reliant but also reduces their dependency on essential gadgets and gears in the time of crisis. We cannot ignore global cooperation because it has its advantages but the right balance between both could hold the key for the bright future.

15. GENDER EQUALITY

In an ideal world, women and men should have equal power to transform their lives and society. Unfortunately, this is not the case. The pandemic has darkened the existing gender inequalities with women facing a high burden of the crisis. It makes the case for the role of municipalities to drive positive change through gender-sensitive policy-making and governance mechanism. Efforts are also required in designing cities and public services with a gender-lens.

16. ADOPT TECHNOLOGY

Cities solved a host of issues during the pandemic using technology. It underlines the importance of being ready with the workforce and infrastructure to get the benefits of technological innovations. Cities must invest in training of their officials and create a responsive and tech-savvy workforce to find solutions to urban issues.

17. DATA COLLECTION AND SHARING

The importance of having data and using the same for framing policies and programs came to the fore and the cities which had accurate data sets of their population, their travel patterns, housing, socio-economic strata could respond to the crisis well and they were able to minimize the negative impacts of the disaster on their citizens. Cities will have to work on data collection and also make it open without compromising the privacy of the citizens to get maximum benefits of data analysis. For this,

cities are required to have collaborations with multiple government agencies and private tech companies.

18. ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

The deteriorating state of urban environmental health can be healed and it was evident when the countries shut down their economic activities. People from Punjab could see the Himalayas and in many decades, the water of the Ganges became potable in certain pockets. Such examples are proof that if the urban spaces are managed sustainably, we can reverse the damage done to the environment.

19. IMPROVE LIVABILITY

Municipal governments need to work to develop an urban governance model under which service delivery systems work seamlessly, effectively and are simultaneously able to handle any emergency. The liveability of a city can be assessed if the city performs well on all indicators such as providing high-quality public services for all people, in both rich and poor neighbourhoods; adequate economic opportunities for residents and businesses; frame policies that create an enjoyable life for its residents.

20. BE SELFLESS AND COMPASSIONATE

This lesson is not for just cities but also the citizens. Yes, you read it right. Cities will also have to develop the human trait of being compassionate. Cities need to be inclusive. Coronavirus, like all of us, is not permanent. It will disappear in thin air. But the contagion has reminded us again the value of selflessness, empathy, and compassion. The pandemic is an early-warning to reflect on our actions and choices. If the migrant workers helping us build a city are not well taken care of and the city where they work fails them in a crisis, it means our system is not adequate and need overhauling. It needs constant efforts on part of cities to ensure the well-being of one and all. Cities needs to be built, rebuilt and operate with this in mind. ■

BUILD BACK BETTER TOGETHER

Urban growth and the evolution of cities have been seen as a panacea to many social issues but the departing year has underlined that it could turn out to be a Pandora's Box if the growth is not managed well. All the global agencies are calling out for sustained, concentrated efforts to fill the gaps and reversed developed gains this year and help cities emerge stronger, sustainable and equitable in the post-pandemic world. Indian municipalities and civil society need to pull up their socks for fast recovery and adopt responsible growth models

Within the fold of growth lies the devastation of environmental health; cities have been a witness to this in the last couple of decades. The departing year has underlined the significance of linking social, economic and environmental development with urbanisation for optimal utilising of the benefits of growth and improvements in urban infrastructure. There is also a need to mainstream sustainable practices in every urban domain.

Many cities became national epicentres of the pandemic. The number of cases reported from cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Pune and Ahmedabad highlights that cities, like elsewhere in the world, were the worst affected. The density of population and lack of equitable services amplified the spread and transmission of infection. In the last couple of decades, cities are competing with each other to become smart by adopting new technologies and innovation to address urban issues. The result of which is also reflecting in the way cities are managed in India. While there is no doubt that adoption of newer tools is essential to deal with evolving challenges, the cities and the city leaders must not forget the basics of inclusivity and cooperation which are embedded in our local democratic institutions. This demands greater participation of the people in all areas of emergency response management.

The disastrous year underlined the importance of putting health high on the political, bureaucratic and social agenda of cities. Municipal officials and leaders along with community need to build a strong movement for improving public health at the local level. This will require improvements in social infrastructure, service delivery mechanism, adoption of high-end technologies and renewed policy interventions. A significant budgetary allocation will also be required for continuing the momentum in the direction and give a sustainable model of development, which can cushion the negative impacts of the health emergencies on the social and economic front.

Globally, local authorities and community organisations proved to be effective players in curtailing the epidemic and providing relief to people in need. It is well-known that local authorities have easy access to their communities. They leveraged on their strengths and reached out to the last person. ULBs not just helped in providing immediate assistance required but also supported in mitigating long-term economic and social impacts of physical distancing measures which were put in place during the lockdown phase. The significance of local governments in reaching out to local communities became more apparent during the COVID era. The experiences of dealing with the pandemic may be used to roll out future projects and programs of the governments and the outcome of those could be enhanced using a similar approach of community engagement.

RANJIT S CHAVAN
President, AIILSG

COMMUNITY RESPONSE

The pandemic has reiterated that disasters can happen at a moment's notice. It calls for strengthening urban systems to deal with unforeseen challenges. The experiences of COVID-19 response also tell us that the role of urban communities and their coordination with local authorities, city leaders, and health professionals is crucial to address challenges at the local level at the time of a health emergency. Pandemics not just bring problems associated with health infrastructure and services, but also expose social inequalities among different groups, and their lack of access to essential services.

During the COVID-19 outbreak, an increasing number of migrants were stranded in cities. They lost their livelihood because of the lockdown measures announced to curb the spread of the virus. People in almost every big city in India like Delhi, Mumbai, Pune, Chennai and many others swung into action in collaboration with civil society organisations and state governments to ensure the stranded population does not face difficulty in getting the supply of daily essentials.

The problem was particularly pressing for the poor, people with limited mobility and older people. Some cities had also organised camps for food distribution. Many online groups were created on social media in Indian cities to assist older people for getting their medicines, daily supply of fruits and vegetables, etc.

Such initiatives were not limited to India, but urban communities and local governments in many cities of the world extended their helping hands to the people in need. In response, the municipality of Milan collaborated with more than 30 non-profit organisations, and private food companies to create Dispositivo di AiutoAlimentare – The Food Aid System.

According to a report published by the World Bank, more than 180 employees and volunteers in Milan delivered secure food packages to 6,33,7 households – a total of 20,744 people identified as vulnerable.

Even the small towns took creative initiatives. Brest (France) addressed food insecurity during the pandemic using a novel approach integrated into social protection programmes and a digital platform. Brest expanded its emergency food provision, launching a referral system to identify those most vulnerable and distribute food vouchers to selected families for use in a majority of open grocery stores.

Urban local bodies in Delhi, Athens, Limerick and many cities created a group of response teams, which extended help to most vulnerable people during the lockdown. They remained in touch with the infected people, guided them to take measures during home isolation, and delivered essential medication at their doorsteps. They also reached out to people in need and provided them with the much needed support in difficult times.

It is difficult to locate any silver lining in the whole period of a pandemic, but the difficult times have brought communities and people together and showed that associations and collective efforts can help us come out from disaster of any kind. Let's bid adieu this year with a positive takeaway that our communities remained stronger, acted emphatically, and responded well in time, like always. ■

SILVER LINING IN THE YEAR OF PANDEMIC

As the year of the severe pandemic and disasters for the whole world fades away, it is important to discuss various policies and programmes which made the year productive. Urban spaces were hit badly due to the COVID-19 pandemic but Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), Government of India, has shown some impressive progress to mitigate the effects as far as possible

SHRILA POKHARIYAL/HITESH NIGAM
Editorial Assistants

The size of urban India, both in terms of population and infrastructure, has been increasing day by day due to continuous influx of migrants for work, education and various other reasons. The responsibility to plan our cities better and provide a habitable environment for its residents falls on the MoHUA. Over time, the Ministry has come up with various programmes to achieve this mission and work towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, this year, the focus was mainly on handling the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuring that Indian cities do not lose grip on the progress they have made so far. Team Urban Update aims to analyse this year's progress of some of the various policies and programmes of the MoHUA.

PRADHAN MANTRI AWAS YOJANA (PMAY)

PMAY completed five years of operation this year and has been the torch bearer of the affordable housing sector in India. According to data from the project's website, of the 1.12 crore houses that are needed in the country, almost 1.07 crore houses have already been sanctioned to the homeless by the MoHUA. This is an increase of almost 1,400 per cent as compared to 2015, when only 7.26 lakh houses were sanctioned by the government. The website data further shows that Andhra Pradesh is the state with the most number of houses sanctioned (20 lakh) in the country. Uttar Pradesh comes next with 15.54 lakh sanctioned houses.

Affordable Rental Housing Complexes (ARHC) is a major addition to PMAY in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. The scheme was designed to provide affordable rental houses to migrant workers near their workplace. It is being implemented in two ways – byusing existing government funded vacant houses as ARHCs or by constructing and maintaining new ARHCs through Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model. Of the ₹1,71,728 crore funds promised by the central government for the project, ₹76,789 crore have already been released.

ATAL MISSION FOR REJUVENATION AND URBAN TRANSFORMATION (AMRUT)

AMRUT was launched in 2015 to provide basic amenities like clean water, sewerage, urban transport, and parks to India's urban poor. The mission programme can be defined in three steps-

♦ Providing tap water in every household.
♦ Develop more and better green and open spaces.
♦ Reduce pollution through increased usage of public transport and promotion of non-motorised transport such as cycling and walking.

AMRUT is a centrally-sponsored scheme with an allocation of ₹50,000 crore for a period of five years in 500 cities with the population of 1 lakh and above. At present, 3,148 projects have been completed under the programme and 2,478 are under progress, according to data from MoHUA. While 97,93,386 street lights were targeted to be replaced by LED lights, 62,78,571 lights have been replaced so far.

SMART CITIES MISSION (SCM)

This is one of the flagship schemes of the central government which began in 2015 with the aim of making our cities sustainable and inclusive in every way. The concept of a smart city varies from place to place depending upon level of development, reform, resources and willingness to change. According to the MoHUA, smart cities are those which include mixed land use in area-based development. The mission aims to constitute the cities with proper housing, walkable localities, reduced congestion, water supply, improved sanitation, waste management and air pollution.

The proposed 100 smart-cities are working towards preserving and developing open spaces, providing a variety of transport options, friendly and cost-effective governance and smart solutions to infrastructure and services. At present, the scheme has impacted lives of more than 9 crore people across the country with a total project cost of ₹2,05,018 crore.

URBANISATION IN INDIA

INDIA
31.14
2.76

State/Uts
% of Urban Population
Annual Exponential Growth Rate

Jammu & Kashmir
27.38
3.11

Chandigarh
97.25
2.39

Punjab
37.48
2.3

Himachal Pradesh
10.03
1.45

Arunachal Pradesh
22.94
3.31

Uttarakhand
30.23
3.36

Haryana
34.88
3.69

Delhi
97.5
2.38

Sikkim
25.15
9.42

Assam
14.09
2.46

Nagaland
28.86
5.1

Rajasthan
24.87
2.55

Uttar Pradesh
22.27
2.53

Bihar
11.29
3.03

Meghalaya
20.07
2.71

Manipur
29.21
3.7

Madhya Pradesh
27.63
2.29

Jharkhand
24.05
2.8

West Bengal
31.87
2.6

Tripura
26.17
5.66

Mizoram
52.11
2.6

Gujarat
42.6
3.07

Chhattisgarh
23.24
3.5

Odisha
16.69
2.39

Dadra & Nagar Haveli
46.72
11.58

Maharashtra
45.22
2.12

Daman & Diu
75.17
11.6

Andra Pradesh
33.36
3.05

Goa
62.17
3.02

Karnataka
38.67
2.74

Lakshadweep
78.07
6.24

Puducherry
68.33
2.74

Andaman & Nicobar Islands
37.7
2.11

Tamil Nadu
48.4
2.39

Kerala
47.7
6.56

Source: Handbook of Urban Statistics 2019, Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs, Government of India

Note: This data has been recorded for the year 2011

CLIMATE-SMART CITIES (C-SC)

According to data from the World Health Organisation, cities account for almost 70 per cent of the global emission of carbon-dioxide. Asian cities contribute 75 per cent to the amount of global emission and are poised to contribute more than half the rise in global emissions.

Climate-Smart Cities project of the Indian government encourages the development of smart cities while making sure that they have the least possible carbon footprint. The aim of the mission is to reduce the energy cost by $430 million and carbon emissions by 16.25 per cent by 2025.

As part of C-SC, Kolkata's Centre for Low Carbon Futures is working with the Global Change Program of Jadavpur University to develop a plan for implementation of the project. The aim is to reframe the threat of climate change as an opportunity for green growth that protects natural resources and supports development for the poorest of cities.

SWACHH BHARAT MISSION (SBM)

SBM, launched in 2014, is one of the most important programmes of the central government to make India open defecation free (ODF) and to achieve 100 per cent management of municipal solid waste in over 4,000 statutory towns. Apart from this, SBM also aims to increase access to household, public and community toilets across the country. So far, SBM has presented one of the best results amongst all the schemes of MoHUA for urban India.

The Government of India has exceeded its target of construction of individual household toilets by 5.57 per cent. While 98.28 per cent of the 4,372 cities in India have been verified ODF by the MoHUA, 99.27 per cent cities have declared themselves ODF.

HERITAGE CITY DEVELOPMENT AND AUGMENTATION YOJANA (HRIDAY)

HRIDAY is a central sector scheme launched in 2015 with the aim of bringing together urban planning, economic growth and heritage development in an inclusive way. The programme was launched to preserve and revitalise heritage cities of India to reflect their unique character.

The progress of HRIDAY through the years has been summarised using the numerograph.

NATIONAL URBAN POLICY FRAMEWORK (NUPF)

NUPF was formulated by the National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA) to determine the future of India's urbanisation and was a significant step considering the vastness and complexity of India's urban challenge. The framework has been formulated to guide the cities and towns and is structured to be implemented in two steps.

First, the ten sutras or philosophical principles, which form the core of NUPF, consider cities as 'clusters of human capital', public spaces as a source of encouraging social interaction, etc. Next step is the application of the ten sutras in the ten functional areas of urban space and management. The states were encouraged to develop their own state urban policies, including implementation plans based on the national framework. NUPF recognises that there cannot and should not be any one framework for every city.

For example, NUPF suggests doubling the bus fleet of urban India in the next five years as well as induction of electric vehicles in the Indian transportation system.

NATIONAL URBAN LEARNING PLATFORM (NULP)

NULP is a digital platform, a collective approach of MoHUA, NIUA, All India Institute of Local Self-Government, assisted by national and international universities and educational centres, think tanks and autonomous bodies. The platform aims to enhance the functioning of urban local bodies (ULBs) and other urban service providers.

This platform seeks to deliver effective strategies of capacity building to acquire a sustainable urban future through a digital learning platform. NULP's sole purpose is to develop an effective forum for the multi-level infrastructural urban governance/ service provider.

To know more about this

HRIDAY CITY WISE PROJECT DETAILS

City	No. of Projects Approved	% Physical Progress
Ajmer	7	99.74%
Amravati (Andhra Pradesh)	3	74.98%
Amritsar (Punjab)	12	66.66%
Badami (Karnataka)	4	57.23%
Dwarka (Gujrat)	8	67.81%
Gaya (Bihar)	7	50.39%
Kanchipuram (Tamil Nadu)	3	84.94%
Mathura (Uttar Pradesh)	8	37.24%
Puri (Odisha)	6	75.38%
Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh)	11	93.30%
Velankanni (Tamil Nadu)	3	78.53%
Warangal (Telangana)	5	55.55%
Total	77	73.34%

Kakul Misra
National Program Head, Centre for Digital Governance, NULP

empowering platform, Team Urban Update interviewed Kakul Misra, National Program Head, Centre for Digital Governance, NULP.

What were the challenges that you faced while starting this platform?

NULP is a capacity building platform, but it's powerful only when one uses it efficiently. One has to consume and contribute to it as well. It will only be a success when people share their own experiences and knowledge on the platform as well as consume the information.

People using the platform have to be both the producer and the consumer to the platform, only then will everyone benefit from it. Changing the mind-set of the people who are using this platform is the greatest challenge, encouraging them to not only use the platform to their benefit but also contribute to it, so that others are informed too.

How do you think NULP can benefit the ULBs or individuals?

We need to step back and look at NULP's aspiration. There is no hierarchical or departmental power to say that you're an expert and you're not. Any person of any department or position, who is good at the role that he or she plays, is an expert. So this platform aims to change the thinking of people and providing them with a platform for sharing their experiences with everyone else.

Secondly, acquiring the right set of partners who will help to point out the problems and suggest the possible solutions, like other alternatives or successful practices of some international agency or a ULB from another city. So getting these collaborations are exchange of ideas by way of various simple peer-to-peer learning formats like videos, standard operating procedure, or even a simple presentation, in byte sized knowledge. If a person from the water department is searching for information, he gets this information through NULP in a simple manner and in time. That is the power of NULP as a platform and that is how we aspire for NULP to derive the combined intelligence, where urban ecosystems can themselves get together and collaborate and share the solutions to the local level problems they face.

How do you think this platform will transform ULBs and corporations into self-sustained bodies?

Self-sustainability typically boils down to sensible use of resources. One of the key resources is man-power and its competence and skills, which lead to impact on unlocking the value, whether it is by increasing revenue, cost-optimisation, or by enhancing productivity. It aims to build a resource pool by fostering peer-to-peer, expert-driven learning which comes from practitioners, civil society members and academicians.

You mentioned earlier that change is something not accepted by everyone easily. How do you plan to keep officials and benefiters of the platform from not going back to old ways?

Technology by itself means nothing; technology will only prosper if it benefits the people, the users. Similarly, if NULP helps people to get relevant information just in time, and in the simplest manner, people will definitely use that platform. ■

SDGS AWAIT ATTENTION OF THE WORLD RISING FROM COVID-19

Sustainable Development Report (SDR) 2020 titled 'The Sustainable Development Goals and COVID-19' said that there will be severe negative impacts on most of the United Nations (UN) mandated Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The world has been facing the worst public health and economic crisis witnessed in a century. The SDG Index 2020, which was topped by Sweden, reported that India is currently facing major challenges in ten of the seventeen SDGs

POOJA UPADHYAY
Editorial Assistant

The SDG 2020 report reviewed performance of 193 UN member states, containing data on changes in SDG's indicators over time. According to the report, the pandemic has severely affected SDGs including, no poverty; zero hunger; good health and well-being; decent work and economic growth; and reduced inequalities. In addition, the pandemic seems to have brought "immediate relief" in certain SDGs, such as responsible consumption and production; climate action; life under water; and life on land.

NO POVERTY AND ZERO HUNGER

An estimate in a report by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) showed that 90 million people globally would slip into "extreme poverty" (surviving on $1.9 a day) due to the pandemic. IMF's report titled 'World Economic Outlook: A Long and Difficult Ascent' said that India would account for 40 million of the 90 million poor across the world and this would account for 44.4 per cent of India's entire population. The report also explained that the pandemic has had a disproportionate effect on low-income households in many countries because they are concentrated in the informal sectors, are more vulnerable to job losses, have lower financial savings and have less access to healthcare. According to SDG Index, India has significant challenges remaining to be conquered, but it is on track of ending poverty in all its forms in the nation.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the global economic crisis that followed revealed how the world is unprepared in terms of food security. A report by the UN, 'The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020' extrapolated that the world will not be able to meet the SDG of zero hunger by 2030. Government of India launched a food security welfare scheme in March 2020 as the nation geared up to deal with the spread of coronavirus. The aim of the program was to provide 5 kg free wheat/rice per person per month along with 1 kg free whole chana until November to migrants and poor in the country. The SDG report established that major challenges remain in achieving food security, improved nutrition, sustainable agriculture, and zero hunger, as the improvement in the score at present is insufficient to eventually attain the goal.

GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Doctors and health professionals have been at the forefront in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic. The miniscule virus brought the world's healthcare sector to its knees and shed light on the vulnerability of health systems across the world, especially in high-income countries that were thought to be best prepared to face a pandemic. According to the Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker, the Indian government's response to the pandemic has been characterised as being amongst the most stringent. The country was put under a strict lockdown from March 24 and the government later shifted focus towards a gradual exit from the lockdown to deal with the significant economic fallout that individuals and businesses faced due to the extended lockdown.

This year saw public research laboratories, public institutions like the Indian Institutes of Technology, and private players including startups, rising to the challenge of working on COVID-19 testing kits, masks, alcohol-based sanitizers, personal protective equipment (PPEs) and ventilators, to overcome challenges of global supply chain disruptions and to cater to

domestic needs.

India was ranked 145 of 195 countries in terms of access and quality of health services in a Lancet study released in 2018. Forbye, a study published in March 2020 by Brookings India, reported that the number of hospital beds in the country was measured at 0.55 beds per 1,000 people. Very little appears to have improved in the area of good well-being and health care in India. According to SDR 2020, major challenges remain in India in incidents of tuberculosis, traffic deaths, death rate attributed to air pollution, and life expectancy at birth.

The Union Budget 2020–21, released in February allocated less than 1.5 per cent of the GDP on healthcare. However, experts are laying their hopes on the announcements made by Nirmala Sitharaman, Minister of Finance, Government of India, to improve the score in health and well-being SDG. It involves the eradication of tuberculosis by 2025, Viability Gap funding to set up hospitals and medical colleges in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities, and Public Private Partnerships model-based hospitals in aspirational rural districts to ensure cost effective delivery of care in rural areas. Although, the health and economic crisis that followed COVID-19 infections this year had the governments shift their focus to deal with the pandemic on an urgent basis by converting open spaces, trains, dharmshalas, into COVID-19 centers for testing and treatment of patients. Recently, the government of Maharashtra has initiated a drive to supervise door-to-door screening and detecting tuberculosis and leprosy cases in the state in an attempt to work on healthcare sector.

QUALITY EDUCATION

This year was unkind to the education system as well. Schools and colleges across the world had to switch to an online mode for classes and examination. Various studies, including that of researchers from Azim Premji University, found online education to be inadequate and ineffective for children in school. Developing countries faced the challenge of providing access to children from poor and marginalized community to online education. Teachers struggled in building connection and rapport with the students and students found it extremely difficult to thoroughly follow the concepts being taught and in completing assignments online. The report, 'Myths of Online education' found 60 per cent of the students in India attending schools before lockdown have not been able to attend classes, and the issues have further worsened in case of students with disabilities.

SDR 2020 explains that in relation to SDG 4 pertaining to quality education, India's score has been stagnant due to a low completion rate of high school education. With the aim of making India a global knowledge superpower, the union cabinet approved a new National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Prakash Javadekar, Minister of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, while announcing the policy said that the policy has been drafted keeping in view the global level of education in the 21st century. The reforms have come after generations getting spent in rusted systems for 34 years.

The NEP has provisions to change the school education system to 5 + 3 + 3 + 4 format, where schools will not have any rigid formation of streams of arts, commerce, science, and the students can take up whichever courses they want. The new policy also suggests a reduction of the school curriculum to core subjects with a vocational integration from Class 6 onwards. The government has decided to set up public universities, at par with institutions like the Indian Institute of Technology, Indian Institute of Management, to increase access to quality education in the nation. On the one hand, the academicians are hopeful of the new policy for it focuses on an all-round skill development of youth, and on the other hand, many fear that the implementation of the policy might benefit only the privileged and further the inequality in education quality.

CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION

While the demand of water is growing, the quality and quantity of water supply is dwindling, owing to the scarcity of resources, which we have created ourselves.

The reducing quality and quantity of groundwater is a cause for concern for India for it is the highest user of groundwater for irrigation and domestic purposes. The Jal Shakti Ministry recently released data stating that approximately 278 lakh households have been provided with faucet water connections under the Jal Jeevan Mission. The program started last year with the aim to provide potable water in adequate quantity of prescribed quality on a regular and long-term basis through faucet connections, majorly in rural households.

The Delhi Jal Board launched a campaign for rainwater harvesting in view of the difference seen in the water demand and supply in the national capital, to ensure that the residents have 24X7 access to water.

The government declared the country open defecation free after much effort under Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan, and it has now started taking steps for the liquid and solid fecal waste management. The funds allocated for water and sanitation, this year amounting to Rs 30,478 crore, displayed India's commitment towards achieving SDG 6, which involves ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

This year showed that better planning and measures are needed to track prevention programs and health care system preparedness and resilience to pandemics. It is important to realise that COVID-19 and lockdowns do not resolve the climate and biodiversity crises and are gravely amplifying income inequalities and other forms of inequalities across the globe.

In fact, as countries plan the post-COVID-19 recovery phase, it is indispensable that they put SDGs at the heart of policymaking. ∎

Let's not forget lessons learnt in 2020

The year 2020 has not been kind to cities.The worst impact of the pandemic was witnessed in cities; economic, health and social aspects of urban life were negatively impacted. The year also taught some valuable lessons to cities which shall not be forgotten while planning for a bright urban future for the coming years

ASHOK WANKHADE
Managing Editor

THE DISRUPTION CAUSED BY THE PANDEMIC HAS GIVEN A WAY FORWARD AND PRODUCED MANY GROUND-BREAKING INNOVATIONS. NOBODY IS QUITE SURE HOW MANY OF THESE CHANGES WILL REMAIN WHEN NORMALCY RETURNS, BUT IT IS QUITE CERTAIN THAT THE THINGS WILL NO LONGER BE THE SAME. THE LEARNING OF THE PANDEMIC WILL BRING A NEW NORMAL

Optimists focus on the bright future rather than the gloomy present. Since the end of the pandemic is in sight as a couple of vaccines are administered globally for their efficacy and it is strongly believed that the pandemic will be over by the first half of the next year. After this annushorribilis, everyone is expecting a great year ahead.

COVID-19 pandemic has caused 1.7m recorded deaths; many hundreds of thousands could have gone unrecorded in the cities and the hinterland where medical facilities were not enough for testing. The impact of the pandemic was also seen in economic output that is reportedly at least 7% lower than expected. The studies suggest that it is the biggest slump since the Second World War.

The last year has seen a seismic shift in priorities of cities, businesses and governments; and all of us witnessed a new world emerge in front of our eyes. Who had thought of attending hundreds of seminars and conferences on video conferencing platforms such as Zoom, WebEx Meet and many more?Students could not go to schools and studied online. No one imagined that they had to stay indoors for months under lockdown. Remaining indoors made us rely more on the Internet and mobile technology even for our day-to-day needs.

The disruption caused by the pandemic has given a way forward and produced many ground-breaking innovations. Nobody is quite sure how many of these changes will remain when normalcy returns, but it is quite certain that the things will no longer be the same. The learning of the pandemic will bring a new normal. The pandemic has brought transformative changes in the conservative sectors such as healthcare, education, and governance in India and how they go about their usual businesses. In normal times, such changes would have required hundreds of meetings, study reports and whatnot.

COVID-19 has given all of us a warning. It has told us that we live in an unequal world where the impact of pandemic was felt hard by the people from the disadvantaged communities and groups such as the poor, women, migrants, elderly, and people with special abilities. All of us need to work together to end this inequality to build a fair world for our coming generations. The city governments have also thought about what are the most important areas where they should focus on going forward. They must learn from the lessons of the pandemic and reassess problems in their infrastructure and equitable service delivery. Every city has something or the other to learn from this pandemic. Cities like Mumbai, Delhi and many others where migrant workers come from different parts of the country need to work on developing a system which helps those who build their cities. Cities need to develop a strong and robust emergency response system for any impending crisis and this will require a renewed vision and an open mind to learn from the mistakes and experiences of fellow cities. ■

UrbanUpdate
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Urban Update is a leading magazine on sustainable development of cities brought out by All India Institute of Local Self-Government (AIILSG). Bringing together the experience of the multilateral sector with that of the private sector and the local governments themselves, the magazine focuses on the challenges and solutions for city leaders and local governments.

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