REIMAGINING INDIAN URBAN LANDSCAPE

Relevant for: null | Topic: Urbanization, their problems and their remedies incl. Migration & Smart Cities

Jun 12, 2020-Friday
-°C

Humidity

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Wind

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In an advisory released on Wednesday, the Union housing and urban affairs ministry asked state governments to redesign public spaces so that they are more suited for pedestrians, walkers and cyclers. This push to rehaul the nation's congested public spaces was sparked by the coronavirus disease (Covid-19), which has demonstrated that overcrowded cities and mass transport systems can lead to galloping infection rates. Pandemics have transformed cities in the past too. The cholera epidemics in the 19th century led to the introduction of modern urban sanitation systems in Europe. In Bengaluru, the idea of the conservancy lane (which separates two rows of houses) and the iron grid layout came up because of the late-1800s plague.

Urbanisation in India has been rapid and messy, and the State has often failed to respond to emerging challenges. Covid-19 gives urban planners the opportunity to address them: Make space for walking and cyclers, ensure equitable access to core services (health, education, water); upgrade informal settlements with affordable housing that are climate-sensitive; invest in green spaces and urban forests to improve micro-climate of an area; increase city-regional planning because what affects cities cascades to surrounding areas; and empower urban local bodies administratively and financially to make governance more proactive and effective. Also, urban policy must recognise migrants as a legitimate constituency, with equal entitlement to public provisioning and services.

India — with its population, diverse planning needs and competition for limited financial, technological and data resources — will not find this to be easy. But it needs to be done urgently.

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