

Vol. : 1

Jan - June, 2002

No. : 1

URBAN PANORAMA



rcues

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EDITORIAL

According to conservative estimates, the urban population in India has doubled during the last two decades and this phenomenon has resulted in serious problems for the local administration which has to provide a satisfactory level of civic services. It may be mentioned that according to the U.N. estimates, India's urban population will be slightly less than half of its total population by the year 2020. Thus the task before the planners and policy makers is tremendous since they have to keep the trends relating to urbanization and urban growth in mind. Suitable urban strategy models must be devised in order to ensure a certain minimum quality of life for the common man of India. This is one of the main issues of urban governance faced by the administrators of today. It is in this perspective that the Regional Centre for Urban and Environmental Studies, Lucknow University brings out a journal 'URBAN PANORAMA' dealing with various aspects of urbanization and urban government.

The first article on 'Urban Growth and Heritage Planning' by Sri M. N. Buch discusses the need for protecting the many ancient sites which have lost their value as monuments of archaeological importance as a consequence of the continuous spatial growth of our cities. He discusses the meaning of urban conservation and points out the lacunae in our town planning legislations.

The Seventy - fourth Constitution Amendment Act is a landmark in the history of urban development in India. Sri Mukesh P. Mathur reviews the salient features of this Act in his article. The taxation powers of the local bodies as per the amended State municipal acts and the recommendations of the Finance Commissions of various States have been summarised and analysed, along with the relevant recommendations of the Eleventh Finance Commission relating to urban local bodies. Smt. Urmila Bagga discusses the various issues relating to the impact of the 74th Constitution Amendment Act in urban management along with the conformity legislations which have been undertaken by various State Governments.

The structure and functioning of urban local government in Mizoram as a consequence of the 74th Constitution Amendment Act has been described by Prof. R. N. Prasad and Ms. Marie Zodinpuii. The Government of Mizoram, one of the north-eastern states of India has set up Municipal Councils under the provisions of this amendment and the authors have examined these councils in relation to the Village Councils of the State.

The issues of fiscal decentralization and macroeconomic governance in the national perspective and with respect to the state of U.P. have been examined by

Sri O. P. Bohra. The decentralisation and transfer of resources to the local government, as well as the approach of the first generation State Finance Commissions, also form a part of the article.

One of the most important provisions of the 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendments is the setting up of the State Finance Commissions (SFCs). Uttar Pradesh is one of the pioneering States to implement the recommendations of the first S.F.C., which suggested a new scheme of devolution of funds to the local bodies in order to strengthen them financially. The recommendations relating to urban local bodies and the action taken thereon have been examined in detail by Smt. Richa Varmani in her article. In the urban local bodies of our country, property tax is still considered to be a very important source of revenue. U.P. is one of the several states of the country where important reforms in the valuation of this category of taxes have been undertaken in the recent past. An assessment of the existing system of property tax and suggestions for their improvement have been critically examined by Sri V. S. Singh.

The challenges of urbanization for administration have been dealt with effectively by Dr. Kumkum Kishore. Besides the problems relating to urbanization, the pollution (primarily due to air and water) in the cities is also an important problem that has to be tackled. It is also essential to provide access to services like sanitation and safe water. There is an urgent need to draft a coherent urban development policy since we can no longer afford to continue placing urban management low on the scale of our development agenda.

Prof. S. K. Singh and Ms. V. Saxena have examined the meaning of the term 'participation' and its application to local self government. The status of various political parties, category-wise reservation of seats in both the urban and rural local bodies of U.P. have also been discussed by them, since democratic participation still continues to be a far cry in India.

The basic infrastructure and civic services provided by the local bodies are severely strained as a result of rapid urbanization, and management of solid wastes is one of the critical problems which has to be tackled since large quantities of solid wastes are generated continuously. In view of the limited finances available for these services, the option of private sector participation to overcome this crisis has been discussed by Sri Satpal Singh, who has also mentioned some successful cases of contracting out of this municipal service in India. A critical evaluation of the municipal services in Haryana has been undertaken by Dr. Mohinder Singh and Sri Brij Pal. The municipal services which have been examined in detail by them

include public safety and convenience, education and medical, street lighting, public health, water supply and municipal works.

The unique efforts of the Government of Madhya Pradesh to introduce decentralised governance through the mechanism of Zila Sarkar in every district of the State and the ways to make the administration people-oriented, responsible and sensitive to local needs has been described by Dr. Sanjay Srivastava. The composition of the District Planning Committees, the planning process and the line of command in the various government departments have also been explained.

It is essential to secure the active participation of citizens in the affairs of the municipal bodies through the Citizens' Charters, which are designed with the objective of raising standards of public services. The case of the implementation of the Citizens' Charter in Kakinada Municipality of Andhra Pradesh and its mechanism has been discussed by Dr. J.V.K.V.Pandit. The leaders of the local community should play a constructive role in order to improve the image of the civic government and the municipal bodies must also organize their public relations in an intelligent and effective manner.

The consumers in our country are faced with numerous problems in the present set-up and their interests must be protected. Accordingly the Act of 1986 deals with their rights and there is an effective hierarchy for redressal of consumers' disputes at various levels. The Cuddapah District Consumer Forum, its organisation, jurisdiction and procedure for lodging complaints have been presented by Dr. B.V.Chalapathi and Mr. P. Hari Prasad in their article. There is, thus, a need to guide the consumers so that they can get proper redressal.

Dr. Julia S. Simlai examines the issue of representation and quota for women in the context of ecofeminism, a new concept which has emerged in the seventies as part of the women's liberation movement. The political indications connected with this concept in different countries have also been outlined by her.

Several public movements against environmental degradation have been initiated not only across the world, but in India too. The major people's ecological movements in the country along with their implications have been described by Dr. A.K.Singh and Dr. Ravish Kumar.

Dr. A. Malla Reddy examines the role of thrift and credit activity in improving the economic conditions of the urban poor, citing details of some case studies in Kurnool district of Andhra Pradesh. The aims and objectives, financial and office management of the thrift and credit sangams in various urban slums of the district and their advantages have also been examined at length.

The role of the Uttar Pradesh Housing and Development Board (Uttar Pradesh Awas Evam Vikas Parishad) in solving the problem of urban housing in the State has been described by Sri Shanveer Abidi. In his article, the composition, functions, types of schemes and achievements of the Board have also been described.

The broad aspects relating to urbanisation in India, the factors influencing the origin and development of cities, along with their classification based on different criteria have been described by Sri Prabhakar Singh. There is need for a new urbanisation policy in India to solve the various problems faced by the cities of today.

It is hoped that the articles published in this issue of the journal will be helpful in stirring the thoughts of readers regarding the problems of urban sector.

Editor

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	Foreign : £ 10.00 / \$ 20.00	£ 7.50 / \$ 15.00
Individual	Inland - Rs. 150.00	Rs. 100.00
	Foreign : £ 7.50 / \$ 15.00	£ 5.00 / \$ 10.00

Subscriptions may be sent to the Director, Regional Centre for Urban and Environmental Studies, University of Lucknow, Lucknow - 226 007

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