

Business

Caught by deluges and droughts, India's cities look to become climate smarter

While designing projects, urban planners consider growing climate risks

MUMBAI: India's southern city of Hyderabad is known as a high-tech hub - but its infrastructure is looking increasingly dated in an era of strengthening climate change impacts.

The city - home to offices of Microsoft and Google - this month saw its heaviest rainfall in a century, which left 70 dead and 5.7 billion rupees (\$77 million) in damage to roads and drains, officials said. In many cities in India, which find themselves increasingly caught between worsening droughts and deluges, urban planners have rarely considered growing climate risks when designing projects.

That lack of preparation - a global problem - is expected to be hugely costly, with about \$90 trillion likely to be spent worldwide building and updating infrastructure by 2030, according to the Global Commission on the Economy and Climate. But India - hit by worsening disaster-related losses - hopes to begin correcting that with a project launched last month to train cities to become climate smart.

"Cities are experiencing huge variability in climate... one year there is flood, another year water scarcity," said Umamaheshwaran Rajasekar, who heads the Climate Centre for Cities at India's National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA).

The institute is helping India's housing and urban affairs ministry to implement the project, with Rajasekar at the helm. "It is not about looking at the past but looking at the future... how we can enable future development through informed action," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation by phone.

The effort is part of an ambitious broader plan to modernize cities with everything from high-speed internet to better transport systems. Under it, 139 cities will be trained to integrate climate risk in the planning stage of projects. The "Climate Smart Cities Assessment Framework" will tackle the "increasing frequency of cyclones, floods, heat-waves, water scarcity and drought-like conditions", according to the government.

Cities will incorporate climate considerations in their management of water, waste and mobility, and in projects designed to make cities walkable and air breathable. Virtual trainings have already begun with city planners and municipal authorities, officials said. Several Indian cities have over the past few years worked on achieving ambitious U.N.-led global goals to make cities sustainable and protect the planet but on a "case by case basis", said NIUA's Rajasekar.

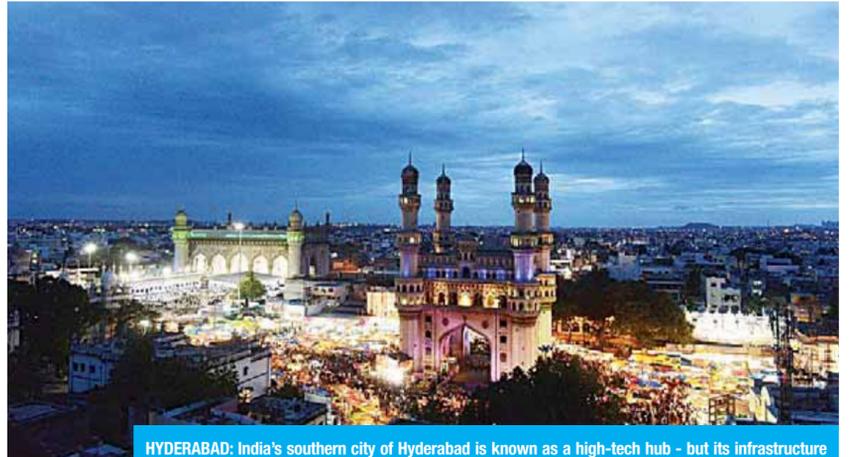
"These actions were happening in parts but we want to make climate part of their ongoing activity," Rajasekar said. "Cities should be informed of future climatic and demographic changes."

Climate cost

Threats to India's cities are growing amid worsening climate risks. Last year the country experienced a longer-than-usual summer, the biggest monsoon rains in 25 years, a record number of cyclones and unusual cold waves. In August this year, a new bridge in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh - still awaiting its official inauguration - was washed away as the river flowing under it swelled after heavy rains, local media reported.

Heavy rainfall has hit operations and shut down the largest and busiest airport in coastal Kerala state's Kochi for several days in 2018 and 2019. This month, machinery deployed at a planned new airport site in suburban Mumbai was submerged in floodwater amid heavy rainfall and water pouring in from a river diverted to make way for the airport, officials said.

Delhi and its satellite town Gurugram also were waterlogged once again this year as heavy rainfall lashed the capital. India has ranked among the top 10 countries globally in disaster deaths with a toll of 98,000 lives lost between 1996 and 2015, according to the UN disaster risk agency.



HYDERABAD: India's southern city of Hyderabad is known as a high-tech hub - but its infrastructure is looking increasingly dated in an era of strengthening climate change impacts. —AFP

Financial losses from climate-related disasters also totalled about \$80 billion for that period, it said.

Damodara Sivananda Pai, head of climate research and services at the India Meteorological Department, said the increasing rainfall over the last decade was in part a product of rising heat linked to climate change. But human changes to land also are playing a role in worsening flooding, he said. "Earlier, the rain would be absorbed in the soil. Now our drains are choked. Because of urbanisation, the impact (of the rainfall) is more."

'Do things differently'

India's population in the 70 years since it won independence from colonial rule has surged from

about 320 million to 1.3 billion, and the percentage of people living in urban areas has jumped as well, the country's census data and studies show. By 2030, India is expected to be home to seven megacities with a population of more than 10 million, according to government projections.

While the government supports urban growth, which can create opportunities for people, "the problem is, how do we want to grow?" asked Hyderabad-based urban planner and architect Srinivas Murthy. Cities in India have expanded into adjoining agricultural land, buildings have been constructed on filled-in lakes and roads are being built on land reclaimed from the sea to accommodate growing populations, expanding industries and more traffic. —Reuters

S Korean tycoons pay tribute to late Samsung chief

SEOUL: South Korea's billionaire business leaders lined up yesterday to pay respects to the late Samsung Electronics chairman Lee Kun-hee, for decades the country's richest and most powerful industrialist. Lee died aged 78 on Sunday, six years after suffering a heart attack that had left him bedridden. Under his leadership, Samsung became the world's largest producer of smartphones and memory chips, and the firm's overall turnover today is equivalent to a fifth of South Korea's GDP. It is by far the largest of the chaebols, the sprawling family-controlled conglomerates that dominate business in the country. Attendance at Lee's mourning ritual - which runs until tomorrow will be kept low because of the coronavirus pandemic, Samsung said.

But a series of top politicians and tycoons arrived at the Samsung Medical Center in Seoul to pay tribute to Lee yesterday, including Hyundai Motor Group chief Chung Eui-sun and Korean Air chairman Cho Won-tae. "It's very sad that a great man has passed away," Chung told reporters, praising Lee's leadership "across entire fields of the country's business community".

The Hyundai group, founded by Chung's grandfather, is South Korea's second-biggest chaebol. Ruling Democratic Party chairman and former prime minister Lee Nak-yeon also praised the late Samsung chief for his "superb innovation that is unimaginable to an average man". "I want to thank him for elevating the country's status and pride," he



SEOUL: Korean Air chairman Cho Won-tae (front) arrives at a funeral hall to attend a mourning ritual for the late Samsung Electronics chairman Lee Kun-Hee at Samsung Medical Center in Seoul yesterday. —AFP

said. Other attendees included the US and Chinese ambassadors, whose countries are at loggerheads over trade and other issues. The chaebols drove South Korea's transformation from war-ravaged ruin to the world's 12th-largest economy, but have long been accused of murky political ties and stifling competition.

Lee Kun-hee himself was twice convicted of criminal offences, in one case for bribing a president, though he was later pardoned. His son and heir Lee Jae-yong is currently being retried on corruption and other offences linked to the scandal that brought down former president Park Geun-hye. He also faces a separate fraud case over company deals said to be linked to his succession. —Reuters

How real are our virtual lives at work and play?

NEW YORK: As our lives become more virtual with technology, how do gadgets define our identity at work, home and social circles at this unique moment in history?

Mary L. Gray, an anthropologist and recent recipient of a 2020 MacArthur "genius grant," looks at the way technology affects labor, identity and human rights. Gray, 51, who is based in Somerville, Massachusetts, discusses how digital culture can improve our professional as well as personal lives. Below are edited excerpts.

Q: Nearly six in 10 workers say that working from home means their day is less defined, according to a recent study. What are your thoughts on how technology is keeping us connected to work more than we probably want or need it to?

A: Remote work is not new to anyone who does contingent work. Contract workers, who have no healthcare benefits and can be fired at any time, work as much as they need to make ends meet, and they have always done that work around family demands.

What is new is the experience of the salaried worker now working from home, who is figuring out how to juggle eldercare, childcare, household chores and everything else. That's the thing about this pandemic - it drove so many of us to the realities that gig economy workers live every day.

Q: How can we make technology matter, but not overshadow our life?

A: By understanding that technology is not the thing that

matters. What matters is how can we apply technology to problems where we see inequity. Take broadband: It's expensive to access data plans in rural parts of US Rural broadband won't fix rural poverty. But it's a lever. The internet is not a "nice-to-have." It's essential to economic productivity.

Q: Are you worried that we are all spending too much time online these days?

A: No. What were our options before Facebook? The internet provides a place to connect, explore and be seen. We all crave social connection, especially right now.

Q: What is your advice for parents who worry about too much "screen time"?

A: We have a popular narrative that says video games are bad, and parents are bad if they let kids sit in front of screens all day.

The more pressing question is what are we trying to achieve when we are on our screens? The most valuable skill is teaching kids to evaluate and critically analyze what is in front of them. They need to learn how to make sense of the world, to think through a problem and how to identify sources.

If there is one thing our democracy needs, it is fact checking. Through screens, young people are learning how to collaborate, and even how to work with a group they've never met before. It's not always obvious to parents, but if kids are developing skills to learn how to learn, that is a good thing.

Q: What form of technology is most indispensable to you?

A: I feel like I could live without all of it. I'm quite conscious of the connections I have with people - that's the most important structure we can put in our lives. If pushed to pick one form of technology, I'd say I rely on the phone the most to stay in touch with family and friends. But mostly it's just talking, not FaceTime. My dad is 91. He doesn't have internet in his house. And he has a flip phone. —Reuters

German business morale falls on virus angst

BERLIN: German business morale fell for the first time in six months in October, weighed down by companies' concerns about rising coronavirus infection rates that are making them more cautious about the coming months, a survey showed yesterday.

The Ifo institute said its business climate index fell to 92.7 from a downwardly revised 93.2 in September. A Reuters poll had foreseen a decline to 93.0. "Companies are considerably more skeptical regarding developments over the coming months," Ifo President Clemens Fuest said in a statement. "In view of rising infection numbers, German business is becoming increasingly worried."

The cooling of the sentiment in Europe's largest economy coincides with a survey showing British consumer confidence also falling for the first time in six months. An easing of lockdown measures, coupled with an unprecedented array of rescue and stimulus packages, led to a robust recovery in the third quarter from a 9.7 percent second-quarter slump, but a spike in new coronavirus cases has caused concern activity could slow again.

Reliance to push on with retail deal in battle with Amazon

MUMBAI: Indian conglomerate Reliance has dismissed Amazon's push to delay its acquisition of domestic retail giant Future Group, despite an arbitration panel suspending the deal following objections by the US online titan. The row is the latest development in a prolonged battle for dominance in India between Reliance, owned by Asia's richest man Mukesh Ambani, and Amazon, whose founder Jeff Bezos is the world's wealthiest person.

Amazon, which owned a stake in one of Future Group's firms that reportedly included an option to buy into the flag-

The number of confirmed cases in Germany rose by 8,685 to 437,866, data from the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) for infectious diseases showed yesterday.

The Ifo survey did not point to another economic slump, said ING economist Carsten Brzeski. "But as all of Europe is in the second wave of the virus, today's Ifo index definitely marks the end of the rebound and the start of double-dip fears," he added. Ifo economist Klaus Wohlrabe forecast fourth-quarter growth of 2.1 percent, but said that could prove too optimistic if rising infection rates triggered a second lockdown. Rising infections in France, Italy and Spain were also hitting exports, he added.

"The real hit would come if schools and kindergartens had to close," he said. "That would have a massive impact on the economy and industry." Chancellor Angela Merkel wants to avoid that scenario and on Saturday reinforced her appeal to Germans to curb social contacts and keep travel to a minimum.

Wohlrabe said the auto industry was one bright spot. "The car-makers are doing really well at the moment." Recent German data has been mixed.

Consumer morale fell heading into November as fears about a second coronavirus wave made Germans less willing to spend, a survey showed last Thursday. A separate survey on Friday showed private sector activity grew for the fourth month running in October. Manufacturing expansion accelerated, but services activity shrank, suggesting the economy is operating at two speeds. —Reuters

ship company, claims that the \$3.4-billion Reliance deal, announced in August, amounted to a breach of contract. After an arbitration panel ordered the deal to be put on hold following Amazon's request, Reliance said late Sunday that it would nevertheless "enforce its rights and complete the transaction in terms of the scheme and agreement with Future group without any delay". Reliance's retail subsidiary RRVL said in a statement that it had followed "proper legal advice" before agreeing to buy Future Group, adding that the deal was "fully enforceable under Indian Law".

Reliance, Amazon and Walmart-backed Flipkart have been locked in a frenzied contest for a share of India's lucrative online market.

The acquisition of Future Group, which owns some of India's best-known supermarket brands such as Big Bazaar, would strengthen Reliance's presence in the hugely competitive e-commerce sector. The arbitration panel has 90 days to give a final verdict on the Reliance-Future deal. —AFP




شركة مشاريع الكويت (القابضة)
Kuwait Projects Company (Holding)

CONDOLENCES

The Management and Staff of
Kuwait Projects Company (Holding)
wish to offer their heartfelt condolences to

Mr. Sufian Shaikh
on the sad demise of his
Daughter
May her soul rest in peace and may
God grant comfort and strength to the
bereaved family members