

# 'Urban centres must be made liveable'

**Ajita Singh**

NEW DELHI, June 5: Liveable megalopolises are not merely fancy roads and buildings. There is an urgent need for a rethink on India's urban strategy to avoid urban real estate "disasters" like Gurgaon, according to Mr Kiran Karnik, president of India Habitat Centre.

Efforts must be made to make cities truly liveable by focussing on infrastructure that enhances quality of living like parks, play grounds, social amenities and the pedestrian culture, Mr Karnik said at a symposium on "Shaping the Cities of our Future" organised by Urban Habitats Forum here today. More than half of the world's population (three billion people) lives in cities, according to "Integrated City Making" - a report by

the Urban Age programme at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). In India, approximately 300 million people live in urban areas today and account for over 30 per cent of the population. India is set to triple its urban population in the next two decades, according to the report. Urban centres must be adequately equipped to meet new challenges regarding planning, housing, service delivery, infrastructure and the environment, said Mr RMS Liberhan, director, India Habitat Centre.

The "new" cities of Gurgaon, New Mumbai, Pune and Bangalore may have witnessed a deluge of real estate investment over the last decade but have failed to create "liveable" urban spaces that really

work, said Mr Sanjeev Sanyal, regional chief economist, Deutsche Bank and also steering committee member Urban Age and Urban Habitats Forum.

"Gurgaon, a flashy boom town that has emerged almost overnight with shopping malls, condominiums and swank office towers, despite it being touted as 'planned' development is hardly people-friendly as it neither has a meaningful municipal waste disposal system nor proper public transport. As a result the city, still half-built, already suffers from serious traffic snarls, power shortages and water-supply constraints," Mr Sanyal said. A similar story is that of Bangalore and New Mumbai which is nothing but a "dead space", he said. There is an urgent requirement for re-prioritis-

ing various elements of urban strategy, said Mr Phillips Rode, executive director, Urban Age, and associate, Cities Programme, LSE. Mr Rode said: "India needs to shift its focus from urban 'hardware' oriented development. For a city to work, it must focus on the people who inhabit it and not the buildings."

## FACT FILE

■ India's urban populace has expanded nearly five-fold over the past 50 years, even as the overall population has increased by 2.5 times.

■ While only 30 per cent of India's people may dwell in its cities and towns, but urban areas generate over 60 per cent of the country's GDP and account for 90 per cent of the government's tax revenues.