Deciphering the Urbanisation Enigma in the NCT of Delhi

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Abstract: Delhi is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world and has remained a centre of socio-economic and political developments since ancient times. The latter is largely attributed to the geo-spatial advantage of Delhi due to the strategic juxtaposition of River Yamuna and the Delhi Ridge. The approximately 90 sq. km 'Delhi triangle', with River Yamuna on one side and the Aravalli hill ranges on the other two, provided both water and protection to the kingdoms which established Delhi as their capital city. Today, Delhi has expanded beyond this modest 90 sq. km area and the largest connotation of the geographic territory of Delhi (Delhi NCR) is 45,887 sq. km.

The aforementioned urban expansion of Delhi is not without problems and some of the most prominent adverse impacts of urbanisation are being witnessed by the 1,483 sq. km large National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi. The Delhi Ridge is being rapidly encroached and River Yamuna has been reduced to a sewage carrying channel. Preliminary investigations suggest that the native avian diversity of Delhi has shrunk and is rapidly being lost. At the same time, despite introducing measures to reduce air pollution (viz. promoting public transport through Delhi Metro, introduction of CNG vehicles) Delhi today has earned the dubious reputation of being the most polluted city in terms of air pollution in the world.

This paper revisits some recent urbanisation trends in Delhi and identifies almost a dozen anomalies that exist in the urban growth process of the city. Some of these anomalies are a result of lack of urban planning and are in turn going to impair urban planning of Delhi in the near future. Consequently, the paper highlights that urban sustainability of Delhi cannot be achieved without addressing and resolving these anomalies. The paper is targeted at the urban planners and policy makers of Delhi as well as at every citizen-stakeholder of Delhi city. Initial solutions to each of the identified anomalies in the urban growth process of Delhi have also been provided.

Keywords: urbanisation, Delhi, urban planning, sustainable development.

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