

Minutes of 17th Meeting of NCHSE Environment Helpline held on 22nd July 2017

The meeting was chaired by Mrs Nirmala Buch, Former Chief Secretary of Madhya Pradesh & Chairperson, NCHSE. Senior Bureaucrats, Architects, Engineers, Journalists, Sector specialists and NGO representatives were also present. The list of participants is at Annex –I.

In the meeting following were discussed:

1. Letter of the Commissioner cum Secretary, Urban Development & Housing Department (UDHD), GoMP dated 24th May 2017 received in response to letter dated 22nd February 2017 from the Chairperson, NCHSE on pedestrian safety.
2. Issues related to development in and around Upper Lake and its impact on the lake.

Initiating the discussion over the letter of Commissioner cum Secretary, UDHD, which mentions about various initiatives being taken by the state government to address the issues related to traffic, transportation and road safety, Mrs Buch said that at present several development activities are underway in Bhopal, but there is no participation of citizens in those development works. She stressed that government should develop a standing mechanism to obtain citizen's opinion on all the development works, understand the citizen's need and implement activities in consultation with experts.

Issues and the suggestions as emerged during the follow up discussions are as follows:

1. Urban Planning

- 1.1 Taking Bhopal as an example, it was felt that most of the citizens are not aware of the initiatives being undertaken by the state government or the urban local bodies. It was suggested that state government may be requested to consider putting the details of these initiatives in public domain in such a manner that all section of the society could review them, participate in the discussion UDED/ Bhopal Municipal Corporation (BMC) might organise and allow them to give their suggestions.
- 1.2 Questions were raised on the viability of metro rail in Bhopal. It was felt that ULBs lacks proper technical personnel, which results in wrong planning and selection of wrong design. It was suggested that State government /BMC may be requested to place the proposals for discussion with the citizens and experts at the planning stage so that decision could be taken objectively. In this respect NCHSE Environment Helpline will ensure participation of experts in the field to make the discussion fruitful, which may enable project implementation transparent and smooth.
- 1.3 State government may consider constituting the Metropolitan Planning Committee having experts of relevant fields and citizens as members as per constitutional mandate. Experts members of NCHSE Environment Helpline offered to participate in the Committee and contribute for the sustainable development of cities.

2. Pedestrian Safety, Traffic and Planning:

- 2.1 The members were unanimous of the view that the impact of development activities with respect to pedestrian safety being under taken by the government or the urban local bodies are not perceptible. Road sides in busy sections have been encroached upon by the hawkers. Due to lack of parking facilities for vehicles near such locations, people park their vehicles on the road itself leading to traffic congestion. Lack of proper road maintenance, rampant encroachment of the pavement and plying of wide and long BRTS buses, which are usually driven dangerously on narrow roads enhances the danger for the pedestrians. It was also observed that in Bhopal, BMC has blocked the footpaths on several locations by constructing bus stops on the pavements itself endangering the life of pedestrians.
- 2.2 Concern was raised on the recent media report of the proposal of the Government /BMC to allow the school buses to ply through the BRTS corridors, which runs along the centre of the road with other vehicles moving on its both sides. Members raised questions on how the school children will be able to cross the roads for boarding or after disembarking from the school buses. It was suggested that BMC should discuss the issue with the citizens and take action as per input received. It was reiterated that compliance of road safety norms as per guidelines of Indian Road Congress is necessary.

3. Cable Stay Bridge – Faulty Planning:

The safety of people commuting through the ill planned cable stay bridge connecting Kamla park and Retghat, especially at the convergence point of incoming and outgoing vehicles at Retghat end is a matter of concern, which needs to be addressed on priority. NCHSE Environment Helpline had earlier communicated to the government regarding improper design of the cable stay bridge but it emerged that authorities concerned did little to find out alternative of the bridge at planning stage through discussion with the citizens, especially the local community , as well as failed to get the design of the bridge reviewed by experts.

4. Need of Comprehensive Mobility Plan – Consultation with Citizens and Experts:

The media report about a small stretch of road in Bhopal being developed as smart road was discussed. Members felt that it cannot make the entire city roads smart. There is need for a comprehensive mobility plan for the city, which should be prepared in consultation with citizens and implemented sincerely, because without proper traffic management no city will be worth living. Besides, may be a web-driven traffic management system as in Bangalore might be adopted for major cities in Madhya Pradesh.

5. Conservation of Upper Lake – Crisis, Action:

- 5.1 In the meeting issues regarding conservation of Upper Lake were also discussed. Members felt that recent report indicate that state government has failed to take up action to prevent encroachment, rather the government and the BMC is promoting illegal construction or taking activities which are not desirable and could lead to irreversible damage to the lake like other lakes on Bhopal. After completion of Bhoj Wetland Project in 2004, the government or BMC has hardly done anything towards conservation of Upper Lake. There is rampant illegal

construction within the full tank level and “no constructions zone” around upper lake, which should be stopped. With the arrival of Narmada water in Bhopal, BMC seems to have ignored the importance of Upper Lake as the life line of Bhopal, and taking up projects allegedly to “beautify” the lake ignoring again the measures to protect and conserve it. In fact, Upper Lake has already been put into added anthropogenic pressure by promoting tourism through development of amusement park, boating, musical fountains etc. These activities need to be discouraged for the conservation of the lake in a sustainable manner. Beautification cannot be at the cost of the life of the lake itself.

5.2 It was decided to prepare monographs on lakes of Bhopal and share it with the citizens to facilitate their conservation.

Meeting ended with vote of thanks to all.

Annexure –I

List of participants of the meeting held on 22nd July 2017

1. Mrs Nirmala Buch, Former Chief Secretary, Madhya Pradesh & Chairperson, NCHSE, Bhopal
2. Shri Arun Gurtoo, Former DGP, Madhya Pradesh
3. Shri Narendra Prasad, Former DGP, Madhya Pradesh
4. Shri A C Chandra, IRS (Retd)
5. Shri Chandrakant Naidu, Senior Journalist
6. Shri Shashidhar Kapur, Journalist
7. Prof H M Mishra, Sociologist
8. Shri Surendra Tiwari, DGM(Retd)
9. Shri Ajai Kataria, Architect
10. Shri Awnish Saxena, Architect, Bhopal
11. Prof. Savita Raje, Architect, MANIT, Bhopal
12. Shri H N Golait, CE,WRD(Retd)
13. Dr. Sudesh Waghmare, Forestry Expert
14. Ms. Rashmi Saraswat, General Secretary, Mahila Chetna Manch, Bhopal
15. Shri Raghuraj Singh, MCM, Bhopal
16. Dr. Pradip Nandi, DG, NCHSE, Bhopal
17. Shri Avinash Shrivastava, Dy Director (Computer expert), NCHSE
18. Ms Deepika Pramanick, NCHSE