

Building The Future

A smart model for hi-tech urban planning

India finally has a model to build cities of the future. A public-private partnership project initiated five years ago near Gandhinagar, Gujarat International Finance Tec-City (GIFT) is a financial hub-in-the-making with several unique features. Being built at a cost of around Rs 78,000 crore, it's planned as a vertical city. A large part of the area is designated as a multi-service special economic zone. Around 3,000 acres are earmarked for future expansion and integrated townships planned in a 100 sq km development zone. Besides incorporating a creative mix of commercial, residential and recreational space, GIFT is also designed for innovative embrace of cutting-edge technology. State-of-the-art facilities will range from an IT-based control centre for centralised, rapid response city surveillance to automated vacuum waste collection systems. Add to that walk-to-work layouts, personalised rapid transport and district cooling systems – using chilled water to cool buildings – to assure mobility and comfort while helping conserve power.

Urban India is associated with giant ugly sprawls marked by chaotic expansion, shoddy infrastructure and wasteful resource use. With visionary planning, it needn't be that way. Across India, authorities can emulate Gujarat in pursuing maximum mobilisation of private investments to push and perfect a concentrated yet environment-friendly urban growth strategy with practical applications for our existing, bigger cities. The combination of efficient public transport, high-rises and integrated land use can vastly reduce service delivery costs as well as energy consumption in these smaller, 'test-case' metros. Moreover, as a business hub hoping to draw firms from Gujarat, Mumbai and Bangalore, the GIFT model could itself generate resources for infrastructure upgrade and development of new and green technologies. Fast-growing India needs to urgently clean up its urban mess. A good way for us to start is to think in terms of sustainable living in smart cities.