

## Afterword

Most of the previous year saw the world dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic, with the Mumbai Metropolitan Region being one of the worst-hit areas. Public transport, healthcare infrastructure, housing, public open spaces, civic administration and many more urban aspects bore the brunt of the pandemic, highlighting the city's insufficiencies. Though there has been a substantial improvement from last year, there remains a lot to be resolved, underscoring the need to rethink city planning and urban design.

One of the most critical and challenging aspects of city infrastructure is its healthcare system. During the past year, the local and State Government considerably strengthened medical infrastructure by increasing the number of hospital beds, medical equipment, war rooms and ventilators on account of the unending pandemic. However, lack of information, overcharging hospitals, flouting of fire norms and other issues created chaos during such trying times.

Sanitation continues to be a cause for concern for the megacity. The high-density housing clusters and unsanitary living conditions leave no scope for social distancing, open spaces or sunlight. The sheer lack of amenities, water supply and toilets makes even the regular washing of hands a luxury! In response to being stripped of a livelihood, facing unaffordable rents and Covid-19 panic, there was a massive exodus of migrant labourers.

Apart from the daily household and industrial waste, this year saw an alarming rise in the quantum of medical waste, tonnes of disposable face masks, PPE kits, injections, not forgetting the food parcels and online order packages. With Mumbai seeing a dearth of space to dispose-off its daily waste, the time has come to start scientific closure of dumping grounds, looking for alternate waste disposal sites and transforming our attitude towards waste generation.

The 'Mumbai Local' - lifeline of the city allowed only essential workers to travel, thus witnessing a major shutdown for the first time since its inception for the general public. The stopping of public transport posed several challenges for citizens. The fear of the virus spreading in heavily packed trains has forced us to rethink minimising human contact in public transport on a priority basis.

The Mumbai Metro Project was involved in a huge controversy and saw no outcome. The much-debated car shed for line 3 neither found a final site at Aarey Colony nor the identified salt pan land in Kanjurmarg, due to environmental concerns, public outrage and political disagreements. Part of the colony near Sanjay Gandhi National Park was declared a reserved forest and was thus a saving grace for the city's environment. Such decisions are very welcome in times of global climate change. Year after year, the effects of climate change are becoming grimmer worldwide. We need the city and regional planning authorities to address these issues on a war footing.

Amidst all this and the cascading rains, 2020 saw Cyclone Nisarga causing havoc in coastal Raigad and Alibaug. We have many laws and guidelines specifying the preparation and course of action for different disasters; however, our approach must also focus on disaster mitigation and policy. Urban planning and its implementation have to reflect that. It is crucial to take our learnings seriously and implement them before another disaster strikes. ULBs and State Governments need more proactive plans and not just react to natural disasters.

Can we be the dream city when basic necessities are still a luxury? Can we continue to build on thoughtlessly? The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed the shining but hollow future projections of Mumbai as a world-class city. Mumbai needs to reimagine a new city that is sustainable, inclusive and improves upon the ease of living index for each of its citizens.