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## Multiplicity

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### Highlights

BM asked urbanists and various stakeholders in the city what they felt about Chief Minister's CBD revamp plan  
Band-aid on critical issues, say activists

By Melvin Mathew

The urbanists in Bengaluru felt there is no longer just one Central Business District but there are multiple CBDs interspersed across the city.

The activists' reaction was prompted by the Chief Minister's recent announcement of a pivotal revamp of the Central Business District (CBD) 'to make it a model area'.

According to the CM, police officials in the CBD will get new uniforms and existing traffic signals will be upgraded.

The citizen activists, however, are of the view that CBD has been receiving undue attention while failing to address key concerns.

"The adaptive traffic mode shall calculate the on-road vehicle count and accordingly the timing of the signal and signages will be influenced. KRDCL is calling for tenders," west DCP Kuldeep Jain said.

"Bengaluru needs to be decentralised for better governance. From the time BMP became BBMP, the outer areas have been neglected. Instead of bridging the gap between old CBD and new CBDs — Sarjapura, Mahadevapura, Whitefield — the political class is not seeing beyond the Vidhana Soudha. We want Bengaluru to have equitable growth," said Srinivas Alavilli of Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy.

Activists feel the revamp is just a band-aid on far serious issues the city is facing at the moment. According to them, the transformation of the current CBD itself should focus on setting better standards for the whole city on factors like walkability, availability of public transport, cleaner environment and other such key factors.

“Bengaluru’s CBD is a typical place with high traffic congestion often leading to increased air pollution. In the west, such urban scapes provide space for more vibrant and social spaces that allow pedestrians to walk freely and breathe fresh air. To implement this model, we need to encourage policies and interventions to restrict traffic in these areas and move towards alternative modes of transport while improving public transport,” said Dr Ashish Verma, convenor of the IISc’s Sustainable Transportation Lab.

“There seems to be an emphasis on ‘beautifying’ without addressing the underlying infrastructure issues. For instance, drainage or roadside drains seem to be focused on just getting rid of the water with no design for seepage and elevating groundwater levels. Water drained from CBD does not have sufficient outlets in adjoining areas thereby creating back-flows,” said Vijayan Menon of the Citizens Action Forum (CAF).

“How much more does the government want to spend on Bengaluru’s CBD while the peripheral areas lack even piped water supply and sewerage? The Tender SURE and Smart City works were also mostly concentrated in the CBD. Will changing the police uniforms, putting new signages and traffic signals make it a ‘model area’ if workers are sitting on garbage and handling it with their bare hands in open garbage tempos? Thanks to lack of hygiene infrastructure. Labourers associated with Smart City work are living under plastic sheets and tin sheds in the CBD due to absence of decent social rental housing,” said urbanist Kathyayini Chamaraj.

How much would the govt spend on CBD while suburbs lack piped water supply and sewerage? Will changing police uniforms make it a ‘model area’ if workers are sitting on garbage and handling it with their bare hands?

— Kathyayini Chamaraj, urbanist

Deeming the project unnecessary, Sandeep Anirudhan, convenor of Citizens’ Agenda For Bengaluru, said: “The revamp of the CBD and Smart City are unnecessary distractions, which further fragments the city administration, leading to more confusion and clashes of jurisdictions. The govt should prioritise devolution and decentralisation of governance by implementation of the 74th Amendment, empowering the Metropolitan Planning Committee, getting rid of all parastatals and integrating all service providers under the BBMP and making the civic body answerable to the elected city council; also make necessary amendments to the BBMP Act to further devolve financial and developmental planning at the zonal and ward Level. The proposed steps are retrograde. To fulfil the spirit and vision of the 74th Amendment, we need to move forward, not backward.”

Activists stressed that it is high time to stop spending money for developing just one area. “Bengaluru does not have one CBD alone. People are not coming to Brigade Road and MG Road as they used to. Growth has to be viewed holistically. The outdated notion of a single CBD has to be discarded,” said urbanist V Ravichandar.

“The CBD region is just one small part of the ever-growing Bengaluru city. Why is there such a disproportionate focus on areas like CBD that have relatively much better infrastructure than the outer parts of Bengaluru, that are in shambles? Moreover, the city is facing real policy issues. Cosmetic changes like uniform tweaks and traffic signal upgrade are a waste of time and money. It’s time that projects and works are chosen scientifically and backed by data and long-term policy,” said Rishvanjans Raghavan, BNP youth wing president.