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RGICS ISSUE BRIEF

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NDA Government's "Smart City" Scheme

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NDA'S SMART CITIES MISSION

On the 25th of June 2015 Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched three government flagship schemes aimed at changing the face of urban India -Smart Cities Mission, Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) and Housing for All Mission—with an expected expenditure of around Rs.4 trillion over the next few years.

Some Important Features of the Smart City Mission are:

Key Features	Details
Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To Provide basic infrastructure to give a decent quality of life to its citizens, a clean and sustainable environment and application of Smart Solutions, keeping citizens at the centre
Coverage	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The mission will cover 100 smart cities in a period of 5 years
Selection Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cities will be selected through a “Smart City Challenge”
Financing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Smart City Mission will be operated as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme, with a financial support of Rs. 48,000 crores over five years i.e. on an average Rs. 100 crore per city per year.• An equal amount, on a matching basis, will have to be contributed by the State/ULB. (Urban Local Bodies)• States/UTs may also access the National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF)• ULBs own resources from collection of user fees, beneficiary charges etc• Finance mechanisms such as municipal bonds with credit rating of ULBs, Pooled Finance Mechanism, Tax Increment Financing• Borrowings from financial institutions, including bilateral and multilateral institutions, both domestic and external• Private sector

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Budget Allocation: The Revised Estimate for Union Budget 2014-15 under Urban Rejuvenation Mission-500 Habitations and Mission for Development of 100 Smart Cities was Rs. 2431.1 crores. The Budget Estimate for the same head in the Union Budget 2015-16 is Rs. 6000 crores. Additionally, the Smart City Action Plan will be implemented by Special Purpose Vehicles (SPV) to be created for each city and state governments will ensure steady stream of resources for SPVs. (PIB, 2015) India has also spoken to France, Japan and Singapore and other countries about collaborating on the Smart City projects. **The prime focus is to attract private sector investments.** Venkaiah Naidu, Minister of Urban Development, at the second annual ET Infra Focus Summit in New Delhi, stated, **“I want to make it clear today that the key to building smart cities is private investments. This is how private sector can drive economic growth by investing in urban projects.”** (The Economic Times, 2014)

However, experts are of the view that the mission of 100 Smart Cities in the next five years does not look very feasible, as it could increase overall financial pressure on the economy. (Economic Times, 2015).

Criteria for Selection of Smart Cities: In the Budget speech of 2014-15, the Finance Minister stated, “Unless, new cities are developed to accommodate the burgeoning number of people, the existing cities would soon become unlivable.” (Livemint, 2014) However, these Smart Cities will not be entirely new cities. **The Government will choose to support the development of 100 Smart Cities in the country. The Smart Cities scheme exists to pitch cities against one another to identify those with the most potential to be upgraded, in the first place. Smart City aspirants will be selected based on a ‘City Challenge Competition’. Cities will be graded based on their revenues, expenditure, availability of infrastructure relating to transport, drinking water, solid waste management etc. (PIB, 2015). There are two stages in the Competition which are:**

Stage 1: Short listing of cities by States (MoUD, 2015)

- The State/UT begins with short listing the potential smart cities on the basis of conditions precedent and scoring criteria
- The first stage of the competition will be intra-state, in which cities in the State will compete on the conditions precedent and the scoring criteria laid out.
- Some of the conditions precedent are:
 - State undertaking to make the City Smart
 - Inter- departmental Task Force consisting of Urban Local Body(ULB), Organizations and Urban Development Authorities (UDAs) will be constituted in order to make the city smart
 - Elected City Council’s Resolution to make the city Smart
 - Consultations held with residents on city development priorities
- The Scoring Criteria are:
 - Existing Service Levels
 - Institutional Systems/ Capacities
 - Self-financing
 - Past track record and reforms

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- The highest scoring potential smart cities will be shortlisted and recommended to participate in Stage 2 of the Challenge
- The cities emerging successful in the first round of competition will be sent by the State/UT as the recommended shortlist of smart cities to MoUD.
- The MoUD will thereafter announce the list of 100 smart cities

Stage 2: The Challenge Round for Selection (MoUD, 2015)

- Each of the potential 100 smart cities prepare their proposals for participation in the ‘City Challenge’
- This is a crucial stage as each city’s Smart City Proposal (SCP) is expected to contain the model chosen, whether retrofitting or redevelopment or Greenfield development or a mix thereof, and additionally include a Pan-City dimension with Smart Solutions.
- Proposals will be submitted to MoUD for all these 100 cities. These will be evaluated by a Committee involving a panel of national and international experts, organizations and institutions.
- While the winning cities start taking action on making their city smart, those who do not get selected will start work on improving their SCPs for consideration in the second round.
- Depending on the nature of the SCPs and outcomes of the first round of the Challenge, the MoUD may decide to provide handholding assistance to the potential Smart Cities to upgrade their proposals before starting the second round.

WHY SMART CITIES?

At 31% of our total population, the urban population in India contributes to over 60% of the nations GDP. It is projected that urban India will contribute nearly 75% of the national GDP in the next 15 years. Projections also indicate that, by 2031, about 600 million Indians will reside in urban areas - an increase of over 200 million in just 20 years. (Planning Commission Report on Urban Development)

There is no doubt that this concentration of GDP has created high levels of population density in the existing urban centres, and brought with it the significant challenges that migration and density bring to a populous country like ours. Adding to the inability of our urban centres to respond to basic issues like the need for clean air, water, effective sanitation and transportation, there has been a constant call for de-congestion of urban centres. While the Late Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru created the first round of Greenfield cities that addressed the need for de-congestion and alternate/planned cities by ensuring the development of Chandigarh as probably one of the earliest predecessors of the “smart cities” being talked about today, this was followed more recently by the JnURM, an urban renewal program that focused on 65 cities, and the latest offering from the Urban Development Ministry is merely adding another 35 cities to this last list. However, it is the details (or lack thereof) of the Smart City program that require a closer look.

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CONCERNS ABOUT NDA’S SMART CITY MISSION:

Definition:

Who defines what makes a city “Smart”?

While there is no one uniform norm that defines a ‘Smart City’, globally it has been loosely used as a term for an urban space that is ecologically friendly, technologically integrated, secure and meticulously planned, all based on a very robust technology backbone that helps deliver each of these aspects of the Smart City.

The BJP-led NDA Government’s idea of Smart Cities seemingly revolves around capital, investment and employment generation. The Draft Concept Note on Smart City Scheme, Ministry of Urban Development, states **“Smart City needs to identify its comparative or unique advantage and core competence in specific areas of economic activities and promote such activities aggressively**, by developing the required institutional, physical, social and economic infrastructures for it and attracting investors and professionals to take up such activities. It also needs to support the required skill development for such activities in a big way. **This would help a Smart City in developing the required environment for creation of economic activities and employment opportunities.”** The concept note goes on to say, **“Smart Cities are those that are able to attract investments and experts & professionals.”** Following from this line are other things, such as good infrastructure and simple processes that make it easy to start and run businesses. **The Reference Note, No.28 /RN/Ref./November/2014, for the use of Members of Parliament states, “Smart Cities are those that are able to attract investments. Good infrastructure, simple and transparent online processes that make it easy to establish an enterprise and run it efficiently are important features of an investor friendly city.”**



Figure 4: What is a Smart City

Source: Ministry of Urban Development

However, with perpetually evolving technology, the definition of “smart” changes over-time. The US is now realising what a public finance nightmare it is to generate funds for renewing the highways and flyovers that looked so smart in the 1960s. In the 21st century, "smart" ought to be defined as learning from the mistakes of the 20th century. (Scroll.in, 2015)

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- The Smart Cities project barely addresses the concerns regarding the wide inequality in urban areas which is not only a concern for human development but also a concern for inclusive economic growth in the long run. Presently 17.7% of the urban population comprising 65 million people lives in slums in India. If investments are made, **Indian ‘smart’ cities might see some welcome changes in terms of amenities and ambience. But to make the cities ‘just’, the needs of the marginalized section who are residing largely in slums of these cities have to be addressed. Such changes must ensure that the interest of the poor and marginalized in the urban slums is also protected.** The slum dwellers should not be pushed to the fringes of such ‘smart’ cities and should not be exclusionary in nature.
- **If India’s wave of urbanization is to deliver the highest quality of life for city dwellers, the country needs more than just the technological jargon that is being bandied about.** (Scroll.in, 2015)
- There have also been some media reports stating that the Indian Armed Forces could also develop "smart armed forces station (SAFS)" on the lines of the government’s smart city projects. The Chiefs of Staff Committee is discussing a proposal to develop these smart stations and a formal proposal will be submitted to the government soon. (The Times of India, 2015) While no real details are available about this proposal it is a matter of concern if a similar PPP funding model will be taken for developing these SAFS as it could potentially create security risks for the country.
- **Power Neutrality?** There are also some media reports to indicate that the government is planning to provide 24X7 power supply to certain customers who would be willing to pay double the regular tariff. The government is apparently working on a policy to develop energy-efficient “smart” electricity grids with meters, which will effectively allow for dual-pricing. “the rates will vary from state to state, but they might have to pay 50-100% more” and “The grid will allow the load of a consumer to be split into ‘essential’ and ‘non-essential’ categories,” the official quoted said, adding the government could come up with guidelines in the next few months. (The Hindustan Times, 2015) As power is likely to be made available through private players for these Smart Cities, **is the government now verging on creating a situation similar to that seen in the ongoing debate on Net Neutrality – throttle power or reduce power to the poorer or “out-groups” and ensure 24x7 power to those who will inhabit the Smart Cities?**

Do we need smart or do we need equitable, functional cities?

A country like India, which is still just one-third urbanised and where half the population of its two biggest cities officially lives in slums or illegal settlements, cannot prioritize exclusionary urbanisation. For example, Delhi does not need three smart cities. Instead, all of Delhi needs to get “smarter” so that it become a healthier place to live and raise children. Similarly Ajmer has been chosen to be developed as a ‘Smart City’ but before that efforts are needed to be made by the Government to solve the more fundamental and existing problems like running water which is available for just two hours every two days. Only 130 of 125,000 homes in the city are connected to the sewage system. Dirty water flows in open drains in cramped neighbourhoods. Step-wells and lakes have become garbage dumps. (Washington Post, 2015). A few months ago Ajmer had also been chosen as a Heritage City by the government – seems that the government is on a “branding spree” with no clear vision on just providing Functional Cities!

- **“Keep Out”**

In the concept note, the Smart City Reference Framework lists out its principles. Chief among them is to **“Attract Young Wealth Creators and others to lure next generation. Facilities like affordable housing, cityscapes, social networks, rapid transport linkages, entertainment zones, etc. should be provided to attract the younger generation.”** Additionally, **the cities are to have unique and strong city identities such as business cities, industrial townships, heritage cities, religious centres, IT city, etc.** The idea is to **provide business cities with local laws that help entrepreneurs in setting up of new businesses, and at the same time support existing businesses to flourish.** Cities like Rishikesh and Haridwar would be given a **strong religious identity**, in order to help them realise their full potential – an idea that does not seem to take the presence of **people from other communities/religion** into account. Another principle is that **the city must be able to attract investments and funds from private players.** Municipal or urban local bodies should be able to generate funds for various infrastructural projects. **The mega plans for ‘smart cities’ project of the present government, so far, appears to be catering to the needs of the rich and neo-middle class exclusively, and conceptualizing on the lines of SEZs.**

- Against this backdrop, it is easy to see that the poor will not be included in such a city. The cities are unlikely to prove “affordable” for those who really need it. **The concept of Smart Cities, while catering to the neomiddle and elite classes, has complete disregard for the urban poor.** It is unclear where the poor will go. In such cases, the slum-dwellers might be driven out of the cities to other slums or might move to illegal and dangerous buildings. **These Smart Cities are likely to be exclusive commercial, residential or industrial enclaves feeding upon adjacent cities. They can be best described as the culmination of the elitist and exclusionary gated community concept, which is reducing the world into refined, high-end enclaves surrounded by vast, formless slums where issues like e-governance have little immediate relevance.**(Down to Earth, 2015)
- Experts and planners fear that such cities, if they are made, will prove dystopic and inequitable. **Some even hint that smart cities may turn into social apartheid cities, governed by powerful corporate entities that could override local laws and governments to “keep out” the poor.**
- The economist and consultant Laveesh Bhandari has described **smart cities as “special enclaves” that would use prohibitive prices and harsh policing to prevent “millions of poor Indians” from “enjoying the privileges of such great infrastructure”.** He further stated that, “for if we do not keep them out, they will override our ability to maintain such infrastructure.”
- In their present form, experts add, Smart Cities are **essentially rechristened Special Economic Zones (SEZs); neo-liberal business-friendly zones exempt from taxes, duties and stringent labour laws.**

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- According to academic and author, Pramod Nayar, “**Smart cities will be heavily policed spaces,**” he says, “**where only eligible people – economically productive consumers (shoppers) and producers (employees) – will be allowed freedom of walking and travel, while ambient and ubiquitous surveillance will be tracked so as to anticipate the ‘anti-socials’.**” Smart Cities will be “**more fortresses than places of heterogeneous humanity, because they are meant only for specific classes of people**”. One class to be served, the other to be surveilled and contained. (The Guardian, 2015)
- **A Recipe for “Social Apartheid”:**
The government’s sole focus is on attracting **private investment without any regard to the social ramifications that such investments will entail**, as the whole concept as articulated by the Ministry seems to be catering exclusively to the elite and neo-middle classes, and is pushing the poor to the periphery. Through **Directive Principles of State Policy** mentioned in Part IV of the Constitution, the Constitution states that the State is “to secure a social order for the promotion of welfare of the people.” In this respect, the Government must ensure social, economic and political justice to the people of India. **A recipe for social apartheid, the NDA concept of “Smart Cities” does not give due importance to inclusiveness and equity enshrined in the Constitution.**
- **Over-Emphasis on Private Investment:**
Multinational technology, security and construction companies have already identified these Cities as new markets for potentially high earnings. But the companies also expect that citizens to pay more for better or value-added service. A private capital investment, in say GPS systems for buses, would require citizens to at least pay for the operational costs in terms of higher bus fares. Companies expect the inhabitants to pay more for better-quality water and other basic “improved” services. (Business Today, 2015) This would ensure that these Cities are virtually “gated communities”, off access for those who cannot afford such “smart” facilities. **It seems that the direct beneficiaries of the scheme would be the construction sector, the real estate industry, infrastructure, steel and cement sectors.** (Economic Times, 2015) Rather than catering to the needs of the ordinary citizens which was the objective of the Government, it seems that the entire focus is on ensuring that certain sectors and industries benefit from the scheme. **The ultimate beneficiaries would thus be the private players.**
- **Eligibility:**
According to the Ministry of Urban Development, the number of cities that each state has been allocated has been selected on the basis of a criteria giving equal weightage to urban population in each state and the number of statutory cities/towns in that state. This has led to the smart cities project being led by 11 states—Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Gujarat, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Bihar, Punjab and Andhra Pradesh. Of these, six have governments led by the Bharatiya Janata Party and its allies. Of the remaining five, four states—Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and

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Bihar—are headed for assembly polls in the next two years. At 13, Uttar Pradesh has been allocated the highest number of Smart Cities, although only 22.26% of its population lives in urban areas. Similarly, Bihar, with just 11% of its population living in urban areas, has been allotted three smart cities. (Live Mint, 2015)

- **Beneficiaries:**

The Prime Minister referred to a “bottom-up approach”, but did not emphasise who exactly would benefit from the cities. **Prime Minister must step back and re-think whether his government should invest in smart cities, or empower the existing urban centres by means of policies that cater to poor and middle class Indians.** For instance, at present almost every Indian city faces sanitation issues due to the absence and/or inadequacy of drainage networks. The migration of people from rural areas to the urban peripheries continues at a rapid pace, resulting in the mushrooming of slums and unauthorised colonies. (Hindu, 2015). Many details and parameters of the Smart City projects have not yet been worked out. The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Urban Development, in its report published in April, had also pointed to the incompleteness. Disappointed by the lack of finalisation of components, the committee cautioned the Urban Development ministry that this approach to the Smart City project would lead to ‘ad hocism’ in the urban planning process., Despite these severe shortcomings, the ministry is going ahead with the project and has set aside funds for the next five years. It looks as if the government is in a hurry to implement a hastily crafted slogan rather than to carefully build a sound urban future. (The Wire, 2015). It would do well for local bodies to stay away from the Smart City scheme for now. Rather than adopting ill-conceived projects and follow confusing directions, cities should concentrate on mobilising their own resources, and intelligently setting their own agenda for development.

- The NDA concept of “Smart Cities” does not give due importance to inclusiveness and equity enshrined in the Constitution.
- In the NDA government’s concept of “Smart Cities” it is not clear where the poor will go. The slum-dwellers might be driven out of the cities to other slums or might move to illegal and dangerous buildings.
- Smart Cities can be best described as the virtual culmination of the elitist and exclusionary gated community

What the concept of Smart Cities truly encompasses in the Indian context still remains ambiguous. Words like inclusive, green, clean, efficient, judicious, smart, innovative growth, balanced and technological tools have been thrown about loosely and without much thought.

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- **Possible Shift in Governance Structure:**

The government blatantly prioritizes SPVs as implementing agencies- neglecting the elected representatives from the urban local bodies which continue to remain functionally, structurally and financially neglected in the urbanization debate. Establishing Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs) to bypass urban local bodies, would mean moving away from elected, participatory institutional systems. (Swarajya, 2015) **The dominance of private funds in the creation of “Smart Cities”, in the face of the government’s limited allocation, may well ensure the supremacy of private lobbies in the governance of such Cities, suppressing the voices of the elected representatives.**

Sustainably productive cities must explicitly concentrate on a clear strategy to incorporate productive economic hubs with new cities, instead of simply creating exclusive enclaves, large land banks with dramatic artificial spikes in their value, which would now be acquired by the premier industrialists. **There is a need in the country to reinvent the very idea of urban growth, specifically for the Indian context, keeping in mind India’s poverty levels.**

CONCLUSION

Interestingly an article titled “Smart Cities to Enrich Urban Life” published by the Vivekananda International Foundation (an institute that is the brainchild of the current NSA and has been the PM’s hunting ground for key officers who are a part of Team Modi) on 22nd June 2015 states, **“Of course only smart inhabitants could facilitate smart governance while helping attract investments to sustain the innovative growth of the cities.”** (VIF, 2015) While what “smart inhabitants” implies is itself a major concern (who defines a “smart inhabitant” and is this an attempt to create islands peopled by “smarter race?”), this statement leaves little to imagination as to how “inclusive” the cities could possibly be. These smart cities seem to be catering, for the “smart inhabitants,” the economically “productive,” active consumers. Such enclaves for the neo-middle and elite classes already exist in India , however, they are created by the private sector. For such cities to explicitly become a part of the state policy is completely inconsistent with the inclusionary policies that the State must necessarily endorse. The same article goes on to say that such cities would be digitally mapped and would employ “smart maps” to help emergency vehicles reduce their response time. Why restrict mapping to Smart Cities, such maps should be present for the entire country, in the first place, in order to ease civil construction and disaster management. There is a repetitive mention of provision of utility services that will be available 24/7. These, of course, would come at an added cost to be borne by the consumers who can afford them in the first place. It is, however, important to note that these are amenities that should be available throughout the country and not just for the chosen few.

The NDA Government’s idea of Smart Cities over-emphasizes technology and competitiveness, which, in the Draft Concept Note, is defined as a city’s ability to create employment opportunities, attract investments, experts, professionals and people. **The ease of being able to do business and the quality of life it offers determines its competitiveness. In the Draft Concept Note, the term ‘inclusiveness’ crops up only twice - proof that the policy has looked at this issue in a very superficial manner.** Smart cities could essentially

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end up being clusters of affluent living for the “economically productive”, surrounded by slums for people who will “service” these enclaves – thus **perpetuating the worst of the caste and class disparity that exists today.**

The larger issues of air quality, suspended particulate matter and, above all, the safety of women continue to make headlines however, they seem to be low down in the priority list for “Smart Cities”. (Business Standard, 2015) The need of the hour are smart cities programmes and other urban development programmes with child-specific components, catering to and nurturing the varied needs and aspirations of diverse categories of people living in them--including children and differently-abled persons. (DNAIndia, 2015)

In the last decade, thanks to the rise of ubiquitous internet connectivity and the miniaturization of electronics in such now-common devices as RFID tags, the concept seems to have crystallized into an image of the city as a vast, efficient robot – a vision that originated, according to Adam Greenfield at LSE Cities, with giant technology and consulting companies all of whom hoped to profit from big municipal contracts. However “a smarter way” to build cities “might be for architects and urban planners to have psychologists and ethnographers on the team.” That would certainly be one way to acquire a better understanding of what technologists call the “end user” – in this case, the citizen. (The Guardian, 2014)

In conclusion, while technology must underpin a large part of the urban solutions that we envisage for a growing economy like ours there is a need for us to look beyond sensors, CCTV’s, smart grids, to **evaluate competing Visions of Society instead of Smart Cities**, so that the State does not up end up creating a more unequal society with visibly higher disparities that could attack and destroy the very fabric of our democracy.

And that would be the really Smart thing to do!

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