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Building in tune with the environment

In India, new initiatives are being taken to develop more environment-friendly buildings, says Dr. R. S. Saini

India is witnessing tremendous growth in the real estate sector and this poses a major challenge to sustainable development. The concept of livable cities ultimately narrows down to green buildings. A building can be called green if it has the ability to reduce the adverse impact on human health and the environment through better design, construction, operation and maintenance.

The Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) decided to make environment impact assessment (EIA) mandatory for construction and area development projects in 2004. The EIA notification SO-1533E is available on the website www.envfor.nic.in. The said notification makes environment impact assessment mandatory for construction projects with a built-up area of more than or equal to 2000 square metres and area development projects covering an area of greater than or equal to 50 hectares. The impact of this notification, if any, at the ground level is yet to be seen.

There were two more initiatives that were taken to encourage green buildings in the country. In 2001, the Indian Green Building Council (IGBC) actively started promoting the Green Building concept in India. This is part of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and



Sohrabji Godrej Green Business Centre (CII-GBC). The Centre is the joint initiative of the Government of Andhra Pradesh, CII and Godrej with the technical support of USAID. It is a unique model of a successful public-private partnership.

The IGBC (www.igbc.in) launched the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED-INDIA) Green Building Rating System. It is an accepted benchmark for design, construction and operation of high performance green buildings. It all started with 20,000 square feet in 2003. At present, 80 green buildings of over 25 million square feet are being constructed all over the country. More than 100 buildings have been registered in the country under the LEED rating programme.

The LEED rating system is one of the most versatile and widely adopted rating systems in the world. It promotes the "whole-building" approach to sustainability by recognising performance in five key areas of human and environmental health - sustainable site development, water savings, energy efficiency, material se-

lection and indoor environmental quality. There are four levels of certification: Platinum level; Gold level; Silver level and LEED certified.

A green building has a large number of visible and invisible benefits. The immediate and most visible benefit is the reduction in energy consumption to an extent of 40 per cent. The consumption of water is also reduced from day one. The invisible benefits of green buildings include increase in productivity, better health of occupants and a green image. Business houses are now seeing Green Building Rating as a tool to enhance their marketability. The IGBC has plans to have 1000 registered green buildings by 2010.

It's a matter of great concern that north India can boast of no green building except a handful. These include the ITC Green Center, Gurgaon, Wipro Gurgaon and Spectral Services Consultants, Noida, all of which are platinum rated. There is no certified green building in Punjab, Chandigarh or Himachal Pradesh. Lack of awareness and negative attitude is the key issue in these states.

The second effort in this



direction has been taken under the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (www.bee-india.nic.in), a statutory body under the Ministry of Power, Government of India. Energy efficiency in buildings is a key area of BEE. It launched the Energy Conservation Building Codes (ECBC) in 2007. Large stakeholder participation and a consensus approach along with awareness campaigns have helped BEE in its efforts. Apart from energy efficiency in buildings, BEE has also launched Standards and Labelling Programme for rating products on the basis of energy efficiency. Today, energy efficient air conditioners and refrigerators are available as a part of its efforts. These can be identified from the 'Power Saving Guide' stickers affixed on the products.

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