

Stepping towards ecocities

DH NEWS SERVICE

BANGALORE: What do China and India have in common, apart from their huge population? Fast disappearance of 'walkable cities'.

Be it Beijing or Bangalore or any other city in the world, they are finding themselves pitched against nature, rued experts at the three-day sixth international ecocity conference, which was inaugurated at J N Tata auditorium in the City, on Monday.

'Ecocity 6' - a joint initiative of the Centre for Sustainable Development, Agastya, Bangalore and Ecocity Builders, Oakland, USA, will see experts from 40 countries propose various eco-models to transform cities into ecocities.

After the five ecocity conferences held in US, Australia, Senegal, Brazil and China, the sixth conference is being held in Bangalore, under the theme 'From theory and planning to development, transforming city into an ecocity.'

"Depleting natural resources and material stagnancy are increasing the threat of a serious imbalance in nature. In China, we are adopting 'rethink, reform and renovate' policy to plan our cities.

For instance, Dafeng, a small county has managed to maintain its quality of environment since 1980, while recording a GDP growth of 16 times in the same period," said Dr Ru-song Wang, president of Ecological Society of Chi-

na. Hoping to evolve better eco-models for Greater Bangalore, was former chief secretary Dr A Ravindra. "Ecocities can now be developed in the smaller cities of Karnataka.

"In Bangalore, we can create walking zones, green zones, green townships surrounding the core city and terrace gardens among others."

People-centric

'Walkable cities' can be a reality if development is people-centric and not automobile-centric, believe Mr Richard Register, president and Ms Kirstin Miller, program director of Ecocity Builders.

"Dangers of a changing climate, rapid rate of species extinction, global

health crises like obesity, are a fallout of deteriorating cities

Getting rid of asphalt and cement and instead developing green patches, reviving streams and creeks and preserving natural landscapes which act as buffer during catastrophes like tsunami, are some simple but urgent solutions," said Mr Register.

"Walkable cities have great advantages, like staying closer to the workplace which helps minimise fuel consumption and pollution. It also encourages people to walk and cycle, which prevents obesity.

Ecocity mapping using GIS can help plan development in many layers after redefining our priorities," added Miller.