

Life is no strife in a Metro

Experts bullish on infrastructure, transport solutions in imagining Mumbai panel discussion

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URBAN infra movers and planners looked into the future as ECOM, a global infrastructure firm, and Asia Society, a non-profit institution, brought Mumbai to the forefront of their global conversation on cities, at a session called 'Imagine Mumbai: In Search of New Ground' at a Lower Parel hotel on Friday afternoon.

After the chai began the charcha with a number crunching introduction by Sean Chiao, president, Asia Pacific, AECOM, who said, "By 2060 the projected population of India will be 1.7 billion people so this means the country will have 18 per cent of the world's population but just 2.4 per cent of the world's total land mass. Mumbai is projected to have 42 million people by 2060 which will be higher than the entire population of Canada. Does the city have enough land to accommodate future growth?"

Exciting times

With the gateway into the discussion set, it was time for Niranjana Hiranandani, MD and co-founder of the Hiranandani Group, to deliver his keynote address. A wave of nostalgia washed over the salt 'n' pepper haired section of the au-

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dience when he spoke about 1947, "The British had just left. People used to rent homes at Marine Drive at R300 a month. There were no unauthorised tenements then. Today more than 50 per cent of Mumbai lives in slums, this is an indicator of the city's growth."

Hiranandani cited examples of the growth of infra and the transport, with certain paradigms. "PM Narendra Modi has envisioned a house for all by 2022. Work on that has started in different cities but Mumbai may be the last to fulfill this because of the land crunch."

Hiranandani did say that, "water management will be a real challenge for us in the next few years. This government though has been able to scale up projects tremendously. Earlier, there were 3 km of National Highways being made in a day, today we have 27 km of National Highways being made in one day." Hiranandani said he was "excited" about the next few years, "I wish I was younger, so I could enjoy them," he concluded to some laughs.

Transport tentacles

We see resistance in pockets but if the sentiment of the audience at the session was any indicator, the Metro got a thumbs up, with a majority



Ashwini Bhide (extreme right) who was part of the discussion about the Metro. PICS/SURESH KK

of people raising their hands when asked if they thought the Metro would ease traffic congestion. Ashwini Bhide IAS, managing director, Mumbai Metro Rail Corporation, said, "Metro is an urban transport system. Mumbai has had a suburban rail network complemented by the BEST, but through the years, we have not added anything to that, though lands were unlocked and the city grew."

Bhide said that projects like the "Bandra Kurla Complex (BKC) for instance, which was developed as a business hub but without public transport connectivity to the hub, just one instance where the narrative went wrong," said the chief, as the panel discussion segued into an interactive session with the audience.



Niranjana Hiranandani makes a point