

India needs resources to meet future infra needs: Experts



■ Economist Isher Judge Ahluwalia, moderator Jeremy O'Grady, editor-in-chief of The Week, and Christopher Choa, principal, AECOM Design + Planning, listen to co-panelist professor Alan Penn. ARIJIT SEN / HT PHOTO

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NEW DELHI: Emerging countries such as India face the daunting challenge of finding resources to meet the ever-increasing urban infrastructure needs, even as cities become growth hotspots driven by an increasingly inter-connected economy, experts at the HT Leadership Summit said.

India would require an estimated \$800 billion (about ₹43 lakh crore) to build urban roads and amenities as the number of Indian cities nearly double over the next two decades, eminent economist Isher Judge Ahluwalia told delegates at a session on 'Making megacities cope'.

"The urban share of India's GDP is 31%, and it is expected to grow to 40% by 2030. It is very daunting in implica-

tion because of our lack of preparedness," Ahluwalia, chairperson of the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations, said.

India would have to spend about \$400 billion (about ₹22 lakh crore) on upgrading urban roads, with the number of cities with over-1 million population estimated to increase from 53 to 87, and the number of megacities — with a population of over 10 million — doubling to six by 2031, Ahluwalia added.

"Cities matter to us because of our present stage of development. Our present growth rate is 8%, but we are slowing down. Our future growth has to come from industries, which have to be generated from our cities and towns," she said.

"Upgrading basic amenities such as water and solid waste management would

not be enough to make cities cope with the growing urbanisation," said Christopher Choa, principal, AECOM Design + Planning, an international land development and international consultancy firm.

Justin Bishop of the University of Oxford emphasised on the need to make "cities more self-reliant by improving natural environment within urban boundaries". Modern town-planning should aim to "bring production to the point of consumption", he added.

Choa predicted that in the coming decades, best-connected cities will emerge as the growth hubs of the regional economy. "If the hubs connect to each other, enormous power will accrue to the hub. The best connected cities will win. If you increase connectivity to a city, you grow a regional economy."



■ Industrialist and Congress MP Navin Jindal with wife Shalu during the session with the young leaders at the HT Summit. AJAY AGGARWAL / HT PHOTO



■ Pakistan envoy Salman Bashir (right) and Rajya Sabha MP NK Singh listen to former Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf. AJAY AGGARWAL / HT PHOTO

