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SLAMMING THE GOVERNMENT'S DECISION TO EXCLUDE HYDERABAD FROM THE SMART CITY MISSION, KARUNA GOPAL, ADVISOR ON SMART CITIES, CALLS IT AN EPIC STORY OF WASTED PROMISE



“NOT A SMART DECISION



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— SMART CITIES ADVISOR KARUNA GOPAL



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● Swati Sharma

President of Foundation for Futuristic Cities (FFC), Karuna Gopal, reacting to the government's decision to drop Hyderabad from the Smart City Mission says, "I think it is a big mistake. It is not a smart decision at all - Hyderabad will be remembered as an epic story of wasted promise."

The Telangana government on Tuesday dropped Hyderabad from the list of cities proposed for development under the Smart City Mission. Of the 98 cities listed for the Smart Cities, only 85 submitted proposals which does not include Hyderabad. The State government informed the Union Ministry that they will propose another city in place of Hyderabad.

An advisor on smart cities, she elaborates, "Being a part of the Smart Cities Mission of government of India is not just about getting funds but about being a part of a prestigious mission - one that promises to 'brand' the city internationally, attract investors and make Hyderabad economically vibrant and inclusive. Most importantly by opting out of this mission the government is letting it's citizens down because a smart city is where every citizen, not withstanding his financial and other status, gets a chance to maximise his own potential."

While Hyderabad is flush with funds, Karuna feels this is just one side of the story. "Hyderabad has the potential to become a smart city but it is far from being one. It takes enormous efforts, a great vision and strategies for equity, economic progress and sustainability. Will that be possible without metrics, peer learning and citizen involvement? By not aligning with the national mission, we are choosing to become orphans with no guidance and peer support," she opines.

NOT A SMART DECISION

“ Tell me how will we access their knowhow, investment models and innovative practices if we are out of the Smart Cities mission of the government

— KARUNA GOPAL

ferent' goals - may not conform to the goals of inclusion prescribed by the 100 Smart Cities Mission. Such a city may experiment and craft bombastic plans only to see them boomerang in the long run," Karuna says and questions, "Can we afford such a fate for Hyderabad?"

Gopal who was represented the Union Ministry of Urban Development as a speaker at the Smart Cities Session of COP 21, at United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris this year adds that while Hyderabad has a reputation for being ahead, there is a lot more that it has to learn. "Have we understood ISO 37120 smart city standards at all?," she questions.

"Hyderabad need not 'reinvent the wheel' if it is a part of the mission. For instance some cities have great models for affordable housing, PPP (Public Private Partnership) frameworks, concession agreements while others have built IT platforms for citizen engagement and city dash boards that monitor crime, critical infrastructure like water supply, air pollution, drain bursts real time. Some cities researched on predictive analytics and big data for traffic congestion," she expresses.

The green leader adds, "Tell me how will we access their knowhow, investment models and innovative practices if we are out of the mission? A week ago, Paris saw haze masking its marquee towers and Beijing went on red alert for air pollution despite these being planned cities. Not to propose Hyderabad is by no means a smart decision," she argues.



Smart and stringent

The mission insists on citizen involvement, access to water and power, congestion-free roads, low-cost housing and categorically states that availability of funds is contingent on provision of the above. Will Hyderabad be so tough on itself? Will it be so stringent with rules? were some of the pertinent questions that were raised soon after the city was touted to be a part of the mission.

"A city that aspires to become smart on its own can have 'very dif-