‘Opportunity for Shared Commitment to Improve Future of Our Cities’: Shri Tokhan Sahu, Hon’ble Minister of State for Housing and Urban Affairs Opens ARISE Cities Forum 2026

Second edition of the forum brings together 200+ delegates from 50+ cities across 18+ countries representing the Global South.

Discussions must lead to practical actions that cities can adopt, says MoS.

Posted On: 27 OCT 2026 6:55PM by PIB Delhi

The second edition of the ARISE Cities Forum opened today at the India Habitat Centre, New Delhi today. The two-day Forum is being organised by ICLEI South Asia, in collaboration with the National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA), with support from the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of India.

Themed “**From Bharat to Antalya — Commit. Implement. Deliver,**” the Forum features **3 technical plenaries and 14 technical sessions**, focusing on the experiences of local governments from the Global South region in advancing urban resilience, sustainability, and equitable and low-carbon development. The discussions feed into the ***Delhi Declaration on Local Action for Global Climate Goals 2026***, which will be adopted on 28 October, 2026 at the forum and presented at COP31 in Antalya, Türkiye.

The Inaugural Ceremony of the Forum was graced by **Shri Tokhan Sahu**, Hon’ble Minister of State for Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of India; **Shoko Ishikawa**, Country Representative, UN Women India; **Dr Debolina Kundu**, Director, National Institute of Urban Affairs; **Gino Van Begin**, Secretary General, ICLEI; and **Emani Kumar**, Deputy Secretary General, ICLEI and Executive Director, ICLEI South Asia.

Also present were **Adv. Minimol V.K**, Hon’ble Mayor of Kochi, India; **Ismail Rafeeq**, Hon’ble Mayor of Fuvahmulah, Maldives; **Bhola Pokhrel**, Hon’ble Mayor of Karjanha, Nepal; and **Thinley Namgay**, Hon’ble Mayor of Samdrup Jongkhar, Bhutan, representing urban leadership from across South Asia.

Appreciating the progress made since the first edition of the Forum, Hon'ble Minister of State for Housing and Urban Affairs **Shri Tokhan Sahu** called for collective efforts to develop sustainable cities to fulfil India's climate commitments and realise the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047. *"From resolve to planning, from planning to implementation, and from implementation to results—that should be our way of working. Our goal is to build cities where development reaches every section of society and creates better opportunities for future generations,"* he said.



Calling for gender-responsive and inclusive urban development, Country Representative, UN Women India **Shoko Ishikawa** stated, "*Drawing on the lessons gained from our initiatives in India, there are three priorities: integrate gender equality into urban planning, climate policies and investments; invest in urban infrastructure and services that strengthen women's safety, mobility and economic participation; and institutionalise women's leadership and accountability in urban climate action."* She added that UN Women looks forward to working with the ARISE Cities Forum to carry this agenda forward so that women and girls help shape the cities of tomorrow.

Director of the National Institute of Urban Affairs, **Dr Debolina Kundu**, noted that the theme of this year's Forum, "From Bharat to Antalya – Commit, Implement, Deliver," reflects the urgency of moving from climate commitments to action. "*As we look towards COP31, it is important that the experiences, priorities and solutions emerging from our cities find a stronger place in national and global climate conversations*," she remarked.

Secretary General of ICLEI, **Gino Van Begin**, also spoke of the potential of urban local governments, stating, "*Cities are developing innovative solutions, building functioning partnerships and demonstrating pathways towards more resilient, inclusive and sustainable futures. Their experiences and priorities must have a stronger voice in global processes such as the UNFCCC COPs, and this is what the ARISE Cities Forum aims to achieve.*"

Emphasising the purpose of the Forum, Deputy Secretary General, ICLEI and Executive Director, ICLEI South Asia, **Emani Kumar** said, "*The ARISE Cities Forum aims to amplify voices from the Global South so they are heard 'from Bharat to Antalya'. We will carry the Delhi Declaration, a key outcome of our collective efforts and a shared call for stronger local climate action, to the global stage at COP31 to make sure that the perspectives and priorities of our cities and urban stakeholders are heard loud and clear.*"



Advancing sustainable, equitable and resilient cities Across the Global South: Takeaways from Day 1 of the ARISE Cities Forum 2026

Day 1 of the ARISE Cities Forum 2026 featured 2 Plenary sessions and 8 technical sessions. The discussions, featuring high-level representatives from city governments, state-level bodies, embassies, UN agencies, development institutions, and experts, spanned topics such as

- the need for strengthening multilevel action to translate global climate commitments into measurable action on the ground,
- climate-resilient water management and sustainable energy transition in cities,
- advancing urban biodiversity and nature-positive cities,
- positioning entertainment and culture as an actionable lever for systemic urban resilience,
- building resilient coastal cities and communities, and
- integrating public health and child- and youth-focused initiatives with climate-resilient urban planning.

The **winners of the Youth for Climate Hackathon 2.0** were also felicitated with the Ritu Thakur Memorial Award on Day 1 of the Forum. The Hackathon invited solutions on ‘Action-Oriented Transition: Translating Resilient, Scalable, and Inclusive Solutions for Circular Cities’ by young innovators from countries in South Asia.

A Memorandum of Understanding was also exchanged between Global Buildings Performance Network (GBPN) and ICLEI South Asia.

Launches on Day 1 of the ARISE Cities Forum

The Inaugural and technical sessions on 27 October also featured the launch of the following:

- The Centre for Sustainable Urban Mobility and Integrated Transportation (SUMMIT)
- *Investing in Climate Resilient Cities - State-Level Project Pipelines: Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh & Telangana* reports
- *Embedding Gender Equity and Responsive Transport - A Compendium of Case Studies for Gender and Mobility in India*
- *A Compendium of Case Studies for Mobilising Funds to Enable Integrated Planning and Infrastructure Development*
- *Policy Framework for Gender Equality in Public Bus Transport Systems*
- *Guidelines on Canal Restoration using Nature-based Solutions*
- Poster for the 'Early Action for Children's Health (EACH): Towards Heat Resilience and Clean Air' project in collaboration with UNICEF India
- ICLEI South Asia's Annual Report for 2025–26

Looking ahead to COP31

The Forum will continue on 28 October, with one Plenary, six technical sessions, and the Closing Ceremony, where the *Delhi Declaration on Local Action for Global Climate Goals 2026* will be adopted and handed over to **Samed Ağırbaş, COP31 Climate Champion and President of the Zero Waste Foundation.** The Declaration will mark a key milestone in carrying the ARISE Cities Forum's collective commitments and urban priorities forward to COP31 in Antalya, strengthening the presence of cities from the Global South on the global climate stage.

For more information on the ARISE Cities Forum 2026 and its agenda, please visit: https://arisecitiesforum.org/

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