Management and Governance matters:
Status of the SEA Regional Office Building

Regular updates on the status of the WHO South-East Asia Regional Office Building at Indraprastha Estate in New Delhi, India, have been presented to the Regional Committee since its Sixty-eighth session in September 2015. These updates have continued unfailingly till the 2019 update, after which the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the flow of information.

Following Decision SEA/RC70(2) of the Seventieth session of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia in Maldives in September 2017, the Regional Committee had decided that the best option for managing the precarious structural issues of the Regional Office Building was to redevelop the whole campus.

With the excellent cooperation and substantive contribution extended by the host country to finance and manage the demolition and reconstruction of a new Regional Office Building at the existing site, the Regional Office relocated to two temporary swing spaces in central Delhi with effect from 14 May 2018 in a smoothly executed transition. The old Regional Office Building was evacuated in July 2018.

This Working Paper provides updates on progress from the last Regional Committee with the following highlights:

1. Progress on the construction work of the new Regional Office, including project timelines, challenges and third-party quality assurance. The building aims to obtain the highest certified “Green Rating for Integrated Habitat Assessment (GRIHA)” of 5, which is the national standard stipulated by the Government of India for modern, green building designs, performance and features.

2. Committees established to monitor progress, address issues and challenges, ensure delivery of an ultra-modern, iconic and green office building and provide guidance, analysis and implementation on the next relocation exercise for the move to the new building.
The Secretariat is working closely with the Government of India on the execution of the reconstruction project. Continued dialogue between the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, and the World Health Organization, South-East Asia Region, towards efficient and successful completion of the project within agreed timelines is ongoing.

This working paper was presented to the High-Level Preparatory (HLP) Meeting for its review and recommendations. The HLP Meeting reviewed the paper and made the following recommendations for consideration by the Seventy-fourth Session of the Regional Committee.

**Actions by WHO**

1. Provide the latest updates on the SEA Regional Office Building reconstruction project to the Seventy-fourth Session of the Regional Committee in September.

This Working Paper and the HLP Meeting recommendations are submitted to the Seventy-fourth Session of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia for its consideration and decision.
Introduction

1. During its Sixty-eighth session in Dili, Timor-Leste, in September 2015, the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia reviewed and noted the preliminary report on the status of the South-East Asia Regional Office Building located on Indraprastha Estate, New Delhi, India.


3. The comprehensive technical studies on the structural status of the WHO South-East Asia Regional Office Building were presented to the Sixty-ninth session of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in September 2016. Vide its Decision SEA/RC69(3), the Regional Committee requested the Regional Office to proceed with the move to temporary premises and finalize a sustainably funded reconstruction strategy for a new Regional Office Building, urging Member States to contribute. Pledges for contribution were made by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Timor-Leste that amounted to US$ 1.34 million for the project.

4. The WHO Secretariat provided updates on the temporary move of the office to the Seventieth session of the Regional Committee in Maldives in September 2017. In addition, a detailed business case report outlining the business requirements and the risk assessment of three available options were presented. The three options were:
   - refurbishment of the existing campus,
   - redevelopment of the whole campus,
   - part redevelopment and part refurbishment of the existing campus.

5. The Regional Committee vide its Decision SEA/RC70(2) decided to adopt “Option 2: Redevelopment of the whole campus” for a total estimated budget of US$ 55.89 million, with WHO covering the cost of the relocation of all staff to temporary premises for a period of up to five years tantamount to an estimated amount of US$ 20.49 million. The Decision also included an expression of profound appreciation of the Government of India for its continued generosity in hosting the Regional Office for South-East Asia in New Delhi, including agreement to take the responsibility for financing and managing the construction of the new SEA Regional Office Building that would amount to approximately US$ 35.4 million (Indian Rupee 2,280 million).

6. Following these developments, the Regional Office for South-East Asia shifted to the temporary swing spaces on 14 May 2018 in a smoothly executed transition. Vide its letter F. No. M. 11020/01/2014-IH dated 14 December 2017, MoH&FW appointed the National Buildings Construction Corporation (NBCC) Limited as the project management consultancy agency for this reconstruction project. In this context, following a competitive bidding process, Achal Kataria Architects were appointed by NBCC to finalize the designs and concept plan for the new building.
7. A tripartite agreement between the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare the World Health Organization’s South-East Asia Region and the NBCC (India) Ltd, the project management consultant, was signed on 8 January 2019. The agreement states that WHO will have an active role throughout the implementation of the reconstruction project to clear the design, specifications and all other important aspects of the redeveloped Regional Office Building.

8. This Working Paper presents the progress made since the discussions on the subject at the Seventy-second session of the Regional Committee in September 2019.

The new Regional Office Building

A building belonging to the region and built for the future.

9. WHO-SEARO over the years has evolved keeping up with modern trends and developments and incorporating these in ways it can impact health positively through its work and procedures.

10. The new Regional Office will have a conspicuous and meaningful presence in the urban mindscape of Delhi. It will represent the strong foundations of WHO articulated through its heavy plinth/base and strong monolithic contours metaphorically representing the streamlined functioning and importance of the Organization on the public health landscape of the Region. Above the plinth the building will comprise three distinctive towers rising to the sky at different levels representing an architectural marvel that is not only modern but futuristic. It aims to create a building that evokes the ethos of WHO and in its conceptualization, design and articulation is rooted in the cultural, social and technological tapestry of its progressive and aspiring Member States of South-East Asia.

11. The building first and foremost will be climate-responsive, keeping in mind the weather conditions of Delhi. The building envelope will keep the “heat gain” at a minimum creating an environment within that is comfortable for work during the day. Elements of nature will be part of the ethos of the building with a kaleidoscope of outdoor and indoor gardens and green zones. These will act as breakaway spaces within the work environment to create a feeling of “well-being”. Rainwater will be harvested, solar panels and the latest technologies and services will be used to create a sustainable and highly energy-efficient building. Work environments will be flexible in nature and designed to encourage teamwork and holistic collaboration.

A green building

12. The new South-East Asia Regional Office Building in New Delhi is designed as an ultra-modern, iconic and green office building. It has incorporated in its design all the sound principles of energy conservation, recycling of waste and greening of available spaces, among others. It aims to obtain a Green Rating for Integrated Habitat Assessment (GRIHA) of 5, which is the highest and equivalent to LEED Platinum. Green buildings are often designed with only a few basic parameters in mind such as water conservation or reduced energy consumption. Green building rating systems encourage buildings to be green in almost every aspect of design and construction. All the participants in the construction process, such as the architect, electrical consultant, landscape designer and contractors, are working together to ensure that the impact on the environment is minimized.
Progress on the new Regional Office

13. The Government of India, and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) in particular, continue to make all efforts to ensure that the building project is completed in the shortest possible time frame.

14. The Project Management Consultant, National Buildings Construction Corporation (NBCC), a public, blue-chip Government of India enterprise under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, prepared and carried out all competitive bidding processes, contracts with the architects and engineers, allocated the different work packages to duly qualified companies, and are ensuring onsite robust project management monitoring and quality control over all contracts.

15. The architectural design was awarded, after a competitive bidding process, to Achal Kataria Architect (AKA) by NBCC. Following a joint review of the technical details of the tender documents between WHO, NBCC and the architects, the construction work was awarded, following full competitive bidding, to Parnika Commercial & Estates Pvt Ltd on 8 May 2019 with a comprehensive EPC (engineering procurement construction) contract.

16. The NBCC took possession of the site from WHO on 18 January 2019 subsequent to signing of the tripartite agreement. In addition, a bilateral agreement was signed between the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, and the NBCC (India) Ltd., agreeing on the scope of the consultant’s responsibilities, implementation of the project, timelines and payment terms.

17. The progress is outlined below under various heads, as per the ongoing work:

Building design

18. The NBCC has obtained all the approvals for the scope of work, technical specifications, drawings, and environmental permissions required for the reconstruction project.

19. The architects’ team (AKA) has completed the major design packages of the new building incorporating the WHO requirements. These packages include such designs involving structural, mechanical, electrical, plumbing, heating, ventilation & air-conditioning and active/passive cabling.

20. WHO is currently closely working with the architect team while enunciating clearly its requirements and associated scope of works involving the new building’s artwork on the exterior window glazing, art curation within the structure, modular furniture (incorporating social distancing requirements), information and audio-visual technologies, kitchen and pantry equipment, and safety and security infrastructure.

21. Subsequent to signing the tripartite agreement, WHO has requested the architect team to identify and recommend pandemic/virus preventive and/or mitigation measures that can be incorporated in the WHO building, such as touchless solutions for elevators and doors and touchless sensors for water closets. In the context, additional cost estimates for these identified pandemic prevention measures have been submitted by NBCC to the MoHFW for it to consider funding these additional building measures.
Project quality control

22. The National Institute of Technology (NIT), Patna, India, has been chosen as third-party quality assurance (TPQA) agent to simultaneously audit the quality of construction for the redevelopment of the building. The NIT is a reputed higher educational institution with an experienced and qualified team of engineers. They are currently acquainting themselves with the structural drawings and would be visiting the project site to conduct the first quality assurance audit.

Preservation of artwork

23. The contract for restoration and preservation of selected pieces of art in the Regional Office, which had to be extricated from the building, was awarded to INTACH (Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage) by the NBCC.

24. Work on removing the iconic wall mural by the acclaimed artist M.F. Husain and the historical twin ceramic tile artworks from the Goa Room depicting the Torre de Belem in Lisbon and the landing of the Portuguese on the coast of Zaire, both gifts from Portugal, was completed by June 2019. The pieces have been moved to safe and climate-controlled storage facilities where they are preserved by INTACH and regularly monitored until they can be later reinstalled during the construction phase.

Project committees established for monitoring

Project Monitoring Committee (PMC)

25. As mandated by the tripartite agreement, a Project Management Committee (PMC) chaired by the Regional Director, with Members comprising the Joint Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, and Director (Commercial), NBCC, was constituted. It meets at monthly intervals to review the construction according to the agreed terms and conditions.

Building Committee

26. A Building Committee was formed to update the Regional Director on key issues. It is chaired by the Director of Programme Management and the members include the WHO Representative to the WHO Country Office in India, SEARO Directors, and representatives of the Staff Association, Regional Medical Services, the staff community and the Project Management team.

27. The Building Committee has been providing guidance and inputs to the architect for the design of the new Regional Office Building and advising on options for workspace standards (including office furniture design) and space allocation.

28. In addition, the committee has been entrusted to review and provide guidance, analysis and implementation on the next relocation exercise on office space planning, communications and change management for the move to the new building.
Current project timelines, response and challenges

29. Currently the three-level basement structures are anticipated to be completed by mid-July. As per contractual timelines with Parnika Commercial & Estates Pvt Ltd, the General Contractor, as managed by NBCC, the overall project timelines for full completion of all building activities have been extended from the initial targeted completion date of March 2022 to December 2022.

30. The agencies concerned are working seamlessly to make up for the delays incurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic and other challenges indicated below, and updating the Project Management Committee on a monthly basis. As per the latest information from NBCC, the building is expected to be handed over to WHO in December 2022.

31. There were multiple challenges which came in the way of the smooth progress of construction of the project. The factors which impeded progress were as under:

- The delayed removal of the RMU (Ring Management Unit) electricity infrastructure has caused impediments to the handover of the site to the contractor. The site was encumbrance-free on 7 July 2019 and could thereafter be handed over to the contractor.
- Due to the alarming levels of air pollution in Delhi, a total ban on construction activities was imposed by the State Government from October to December 2019. On 10 December 2019 the ban was lifted partially, and normal construction activities resumed only in February 2020.
- Intermittent ingress of sewer/storm water from a nearby drainage system into the building site was recorded from December 2019 to July 2020. Numerous meetings with the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) were held by SEARO and NBCC representatives to resolve this matter. The pipelines were temporarily repaired, and Delhi Jal Board has agreed to SEARO's request for a new sewer line as a permanent solution.
- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the government authorities imposed a ban on all construction works in Delhi from March to June 2020. During this time, the labourers, for whom temporary residences had been set up, demobilized and left the construction site. After that, work was started initially with available labour, which was 30% of what was required at the site.
- In July 2020, an unprecedented amount of rainwater flooded the drain channel adjoining the construction site. The water filled the excavated site for the basement foundation and also partially damaged the protective diaphragm basement wall. Thereafter, municipal authorities imposed a project construction ban of all activities, which was lifted in October 2020.
- The COVID-19 second surge triggered a lockdown in Delhi from 16 April to 7 June 2021 and substantially reduced the workforce again. Incidentally, all construction projects have been granted extension of time of up to six months as per a Ministry of Finance order dated 13 May 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
32. All efforts are being made to remobilize the project with the required labour force. The reinforced cement concrete work in the basement is currently ongoing, most of which has been planned to be completed by end-August 2021. NBCC has assured the WHO Monitoring Committee (PMC) that all efforts will be undertaken to compress the extended project completion timelines.

**Current status and the way forward**

33. The new WHO Building structure has a basement made of reinforced cement concrete. Every effort is being made by the Project Management Committee, NBCC and the construction contractor to ensure that the basement work is completed before potential flooding problems may arise during the monsoon season starting July 2021. The remaining ongoing basement works involve the following activities.

- Repair to the damaged portion of the basement diaphragm wall is ongoing.
- Fixing the remaining work of placing in position the diaphragm wall anchors.
- Constructing the remaining 30% of the basement’s structural walls and concrete slabs.

34. Every effort is being made by PMC to complete and hand over the building by December 2022. WHO is continuing to work on the requirements and scope of work related to art and décor, the exterior window glazing, art curation within the building, modular furniture, information and audiovisual technologies, kitchen equipment and safety and security infrastructure.

35. The overall project timelines allow for full completion of all activities by December 2022. As per the contractual timelines with Parnika Commercial & Estates Pvt Ltd, the General Contractor, the completed building will be handed over to WHO by the end of 2022. The Secretariat will continue to work closely with MoHFW to make this project a success and remains committed to report on its progress to the Regional Committee each year.

36. Following the Regional Committee Decision SEA/RC69(3) to finalize a sustainably funded reconstruction strategy for the Regional Office, the Secretariat urges those Member States who are yet to confirm, to consider pledging funds, which will be critical to enable specific elements of the project to be completed while ensuring that the project is reflective of WHO’s unique, representative and convening mandate.