

REGIONAL COMMITTEE

Provisional Agenda item 11.1

Seventy-fifth Session

SEA/RC75/17

*Paro, Bhutan**5–9 September 2022*

28 July 2022

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

Regular updates on the status of the new 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.

Following Decision SEA/RC70(2) of the Seventieth session of the Regional Committee in Maldives in September 2017, the Regional Committee decided to redevelop the whole campus as the best means to manage the ramified structural issues involved.

Having secured excellent cooperation from and substantive contributions extended by the host country to finance and manage the demolition and reconstruction of a new building at the site, the Regional Office relocated to two temporary swing spaces in central Delhi 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 made since the last Regional Committee with a focus on the following:

- (1) Progress on construction work of the new Regional Office, including project timelines, challenges and third-party quality assurance.
- (2) Report on committees established to monitor progress and address challenges in the quest to deliver an ultra-modern, iconic green office building and provide guidance and analysis therewith on the implementation of the next relocation exercise to the new building.

The Secretariat has been working closely with the Government of India on the execution of the reconstruction project. Dialogue between the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare of India and the WHO South-East Asia Regional Office towards efficient and successful completion of the project within agreed timelines is continuing.

This Working Paper was presented to the High-Level Preparatory Meeting for its review and recommendations. The HLP Meeting reviewed the paper and made the following recommendation for consideration by the Seventy-fifth Session of the Regional Committee:

Action by WHO

- (1) Provide the latest updates on the SE Asia Regional Office Building reconstruction project to the Seventy-fifth Session of the Regional Committee in September.

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

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.
2. The Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoH&FW), Government of India, undertook a detailed analysis of the structural facilities at the Regional Office campus, and issued a report titled “Seismic strengthening of buildings at the WHO SEARO campus, New Delhi” in January 2016.
3. 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 Regional Committee in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in September 2016. Vide its Decision SEA/RC69(3), the Regional Committee requested the Regional Office to proceed to 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 to the new building construction were made by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Timor-Leste that cumulatively amounted to US\$ 1.34 million.
4. A detailed business case report outlining the requirements and risk assessment of three available options were presented to the Seventieth session of the Committee in Maldives in September 2017. 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 Decision SEA/RC70(2) called for “Redevelopment of the whole campus” at an estimated cost 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 amounting to about US\$ 20.49 million. The Committee expressed profound appreciation of the Government of India for its continued generosity in hosting the Regional Office for South-East Asia in New Delhi, including its consenting to finance and manage the construction of the new Regional Office Building to the tune of approximately US\$ 35.4 million or Indian Rupee 2280 million.
6. The Regional Office shifted to a temporary relocation on 14 May 2018. Vide its letter dated 14 December 2017, MoH&FW appointed the National Buildings Construction Corporation (NBCC) Limited as the project management consultancy agency for the reconstruction. After a competitive bidding process, Achal Kataria Architects were appointed by NBCC to finalize the designs and concept plan for the new building. A tripartite agreement between the Ministry of Health, the WHO South-East Asia Region and NBCC (India) Ltd. was signed on 8 January 2019.
7. Enumerated hereinafter is sequence of events since the discussions on this Agenda item at the Seventy-fourth session of the Regional Committee in September 2021.

The new WHO SE Asia Regional Office Building

A building belonging to the Region and built for the future

8. The new building that will house the Regional Office – referred to as World Health House – marks the culmination of evolving modern trends and architectural developments and processes that SEARO has incorporated in ways that can positively impact the health of its staff. The new and iconic Regional Office will have a conspicuous and meaningful presence on the urban mindscape of Delhi and reflect the overarching organizational values of WHO. Its design and articulation is rooted in the cultural, social and technological tapestry of the progressive and aspiring Member States of South-East Asia.

9. The building first and foremost will be climate-responsive, keeping in mind the weather conditions of Delhi. The building's climatic "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 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 used to create a sustainable, energy-efficient building. Work environments will be flexible in nature and designed to encourage teamwork and holistic collaboration.

A green World Health House

10. The new World Health House is being designed as an ultra-modern green premise. It has incorporated in its design all the sound principles of energy conservation, recycling of waste and greening of available spaces, among others. The building aims to obtain a Green Rating for Integrated Habitat Assessment (GRIHA) of 5, which is the highest grade 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 rating systems incorporate 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 minimal.

Progress on the new Regional Office

11. The Government of India, and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in particular, continue to make all efforts to ensure that the building project is completed in the shortest possible timeframe.

12. NBCC is a public, blue chip enterprise under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs. It has carried out all competitive bidding processes, contracts with architects and engineers, and allocated the different work packages to duly qualified companies, to ensure robust onsite project management monitoring and quality control over all contracts.

13. The architectural design was awarded, after competitive bidding, to Achal Kataria Architects (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 to Parnika Commercial & Estates Pvt Ltd after bidding. A comprehensive EPC (engineering procurement construction) contract was signed on 8 May 2019.
14. 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 NBCC (India) Ltd that agreed on the scope of the consultant's responsibilities, implementation, timelines and payment terms.
15. Ongoing progress at the site is outlined below under various relevant heads:

Building design

16. NBCC has obtained all approvals for the scope of work, technical specifications, drawings and environmental permissions required for the reconstruction project. AKA has completed the major design templates incorporating WHO's requirements. These templates include designs involving structural, mechanical, electrical, plumbing, heating, ventilation and air-conditioning, and laying of active/passive cables.
17. WHO is currently working closely with the architect's team while enunciating clearly its requirements, including the 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 audiovisual technologies, kitchen and pantry equipment, and the safety and security mechanisms.
18. Subsequent to signing the tripartite agreement, WHO has requested the architect's team to identify and recommend pandemic/virus mitigation measures that can be incorporated in the building, such as touchless solutions and sensors for elevators, doors and water closets. Additional cost estimates for these identified pandemic prevention measures have been submitted by NBCC to MoHFW for consideration.

Project quality control

19. The National Institute of Technology (NIT), Patna, India, has been chosen as third-party quality audit (TPQA) agent to obtain regular and independent technical quality assessments for civil, electrical, mechanical and all other allied construction works. NIT Patna is a reputed educational institution with an experienced and qualified team of engineers.
20. Since June 2021, NIT personnel have visited the building site bi-monthly and conducted seven quality assurance audits in total. By and large, the construction works are being properly carried out, including adequate testing of construction material. Mandatory construction procedures are in place, such as the use of only approved materials and concrete, and the outer surfaces of structural members have been provided with Mivan aluminum shuttering formworks instead of wooden. Mivan shuttering is a fast-paced construction technique which is highly durable and ensures better-quality finished concrete.

21. To date, however, the audits have revealed numerous construction shortcomings, such as with the overall workmanship quality, misaligned and gaps/spaces between some concrete structural members and columns, some fabricated steel erections are to be in line with approved drawings and the occasional seepage of water in the basement wall. The onsite construction contractor, Parnika Commercial & Estates Pvt. Ltd, and NBCC are aware of these shortcomings and corrective measures have been taken. These include injection grouting on walls and slabs, alignment of the columns before casting and checking of the fabricated steel erection as per the original shopfloor drawings. The Project Monitoring Consultant under contractual agreement with the Regional Office submits to NBCC a compliance report on construction shortcomings on a monthly basis.

Preservation of heritage artwork

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

23. Work on removing the iconic wall mural by the acclaimed artist M.F. Husain and the historical twin ceramic tile artworks from the erstwhile Goa Room depicting the Torre de Belem in Lisbon and the landing of the Portuguese mercantile explorers on the coast of Zaire during the imperial age, both gifts from the Government of Portugal (an Associate Member of the SE Asia Region till 1962) was completed by June 2019. The pieces have been moved to safe and climate-controlled storage facilities by INTACH and are regularly monitored until they can be later re-installed.

Project committees established for monitoring

Project Monitoring Committee (PMC)

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

Building Committee

25. A Building Committee was constituted to update the Regional Director on key issues. It is chaired by the Director of Programme Management, and members include the WHO Representative to India, SEARO Directors, and representatives of the Staff Association, Regional Medical Services, the staff community and the project management team.

26. The Building Committee has been providing guidance and inputs to the architect for the design of the new Regional Office Building and providing advice on options for workspace standards (including office furniture design) and space allocation. The committee has also been entrusted to review and provide guidance on and analysis of the implementation on the next relocation exercise on office space planning, communications and change management for the move to the new building.

27. In addition, various in-house subcommittees were formed by WHO-SEARO in January 2022 with the involvement of Department Directors, senior staff members and Staff Association representatives for better monitoring of the redevelopment project in coordination with NBCC, to monitor specific areas of work, such as audiovisual and information technology, interiors and artwork, office seating layouts, landscaping, water and waste management, parking provision, procurement of office furniture and material, etc.

Current project timelines, response and challenges

28. As of June 2022, the three-level basement structures are anticipated to be completed by 30 September 2022. Additionally, 5–6 floors of building towers “W” and “H” have been constructed.

29. As per contractual timelines with Parnika Commercial & Estates Pvt Ltd, the General Contractor, the overall project timelines for full completion of all building activities have been extended from the initial targeted completion date of December 2021 to July 2023. The agencies concerned are working to make up for the delays incurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic and other challenges indicated below, and are updating the Project Management Committee on a monthly basis.

30. There were multiple challenges that have impeded the progress of construction. The major factors are:

- Delayed removal of the RMU (ring management unit) electricity infrastructure caused cascading delays in 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 Government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi 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. Several meetings with the state water management authorities – the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) – have been held by SEARO and NBCC representatives to resolve this. 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. Work could restart with only the labour available, which was initially 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 laying the foundations of the basement and also partially damaged the protective diaphragm basement wall. Thereafter, municipal authorities imposed a project construction ban on all activities, which was lifted only in October 2020.
- The second surge of the COVID-19 pandemic in Delhi triggered a lockdown in the state from 16 April to 7 June 2021 that again reduced the available workforce substantially.
- All construction projects in Delhi were granted extension of time with regard to concerning contractual obligations of up to six months as per a Ministry of Finance order dated 13 May 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The construction works did not progress considerably after the second surge of COVID-19 due to the reduced workforce availability in the city. In addition, there was also a complete ban on all construction works in Delhi from November to December 2021 by an order of the Supreme Court of India due to the alarming levels of winter pollution in the city.
- Construction resumed in January 2022 with the remobilization of adequate labour and required equipment.
- Due to a powerful storm that struck Delhi on 30 May 2022, the temporary structures (staging and shuttering) to shift or mould poured concrete into the desired shapes at the construction site were significantly damaged, resulting in further delay of a month.

However, the third tower “O” has long been a challenge for construction works to begin at the basement level due to porous soil conditions resulting from past flooding and heavy rains. The solution to this engineering challenge was evaluated and vertical pile foundations have been installed and extended into the earth to keep the structure of tower “O” stable. This solution led to loss of a large amount floorspace for the third basement of tower “O”. Construction of the raft foundation or the basement floor at the minus 3 level of tower “O” began in the last week of June 2022.

Current status and the way forward

31. NBCC has assured the WHO Monitoring Committee that all efforts will be undertaken to hand over the completed building by July 2023. In addition, regular meetings with SEARO subcommittees, the Building Committee and PMC, with the involvement of WHO Senior Management, officials of the Ministry of Health and other stakeholders, have been taking place to review progress.

32. Continued review meetings of subcommittees of SEARO with NBCC, the architects and the construction contractor and other stakeholders has resulted in regular and active collaboration and an empathy with WHO’s requirements and aspirations, including the added pandemic-preventive infrastructure and cost-saving needs. A decision has been taken to reuse existing office furniture and equipment wherever possible.

33. To assist with the review of construction quality and scheduling, an outsourced project monitoring consultant company, Cushman & Wakefield, was appointed by WHO-SEARO in May 2022 to work closely with NBCC and other stakeholders onsite and report to WHO on a weekly basis.
34. Every effort has been made by the Project Monitoring Committee, NBCC and the construction contractor to complete the three basement levels of tower “O” before potential flooding problems arise during the 2022 monsoon season. Due to the ongoing engineering challenges, the tower “O” basements are not expected to be completed until mid-September 2022. The risk of flooding therefore remains with the potential to trigger further project completion delays.
35. WHO continues to stipulate requirements and finalize the scope of work related to art and décor, facade, art curation within the building, modular furniture, information and audiovisual technologies, kitchen equipment and safety and security infrastructure, seating layouts, parking and other amenities in the new Building.
36. 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.
37. With reference to the Regional Committee Decision SEA/RC69(3) on a sustainably funded reconstruction strategy for the Regional Office, the Secretariat urges all Member States to consider pledging funds, which will be critical to enable specific elements of the project to be completed within the preferred timelines while ensuring that the project is reflective of WHO’s unique work milieu and representative and inclusive mandate.