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ENVIRONMENT-INDIA: Green Buildings Popular With Builders, Clients

By Keya Acharya

BANGALORE, Sep 17 (IPS) - India's energy conservation laws for buildings are voluntary but this is one area in which the country is already 'greener' than in many parts of the developed world.

"In terms of pace and speed, we are significantly ahead," says Chandrasekhar Hariharan, managing director of the Bangalore-based Biodiversity Conservation (India) Limited (BCIL), the country's largest builders of environmentally sound, energy-efficient homes.

A 'green building' is designed to be as efficient as possible in its use of energy, resources such as water and building materials, disposal of solid waste and functionally, financially and aesthetically viable to both client and builder.

S. Raghupathy, director of the Hyderabad-based Indian Green Building Council (IGBC) set up in 2000, says the country's modest 25,000 square feet of 'green buildings' in 2003 has grown to a phenomenal 25 million sq.ft in just 4 years, projected to grow to one billion sq. ft per year by 2010.

Part of the reason for this rapid growth is India's high economic growth and emerging status of global business giant, resulting in imminent demand for commercial, infrastructural and residential construction.

The country seconds China in its growth and demand of infrastructural development.

In spite of India's per capita consumption of energy being far lower than western economies, it's building sector has climbed to an usage of nearly 30 percent energy, up from a low 14 percent in the 1970s.

Industrialised countries' buildings account for at least 40 percent of energy use and are major contributors to global emissions, says Mili Majumdar, associate director of sustainable building science at The Energy Resources Institute (TERI) and head of its green building guideline project called 'GRIHA'.

Most Indian buildings are also copying western energy-intensive building concepts such as high airconditioning



Green dwellings are popular because they save money for builders and clients.

Credit:Keya Acharya/IPS



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and heat-radiative glass. Making Indian buildings energy efficient is thus crucial, since it is growing at such a fast pace, says Majumdar.

The gross built-up area added to commercial and residential spaces was about 40.8 million square meters in 2004-05, which is about one percent of annual average constructed floor area around the world. The demand and shortfall continues.

As per the National Housing Bank, India has a shortage of 8.9 million urban housing units.

In Bangalore, BCIL's five-acre award-winning T-Zed (or towards zero-energy development) residential cluster uses, treats and recycles its own stored water from rainwater and water-recharging methods, zero-electricity fridge-freezers, solar heating and lighting and a compressor-free air-conditioning system that keep homes dust-free and cool using energy-efficient earth tunnel vents and nocturnal cooling.

"We even drink our tap-water", says Taranjit Nair a resident and mother-of-two. Due to poor quality, on tap drinking water is a luxury in India.

"We want to be a model for others to follow", says BCIL's MD Hariharan, a founder-member of the 2008 Green Residential Rating System, which has more features than India's ECBC and has already had 70 million sq. feet of building-applicants within a month of its launch.

In New Delhi, The Energy Resources Institute (TERI) has been instrumental in the government's efforts at introducing green building regulations. India's new national action plan on climate change uses the Energy Conservation Building Code (ECBC) in its sustainable habitat and energy efficiency measures and the code is slated shortly to become mandatory for commercial buildings with a load of 500 KVA (kilo volt amperes) or more.

TERI's Delhi-based flagship, green building, the India Habitat Centre remains an island of ventilated and spacious green. Its training center at Gurgaon, around 50 km outside Delhi employs numerous passive techniques to cut down energy demands in cooling, heating and lighting.

The IGBC's standard of green buildings is based on the U.S.' Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), popular in several western countries. LEED ranks buildings based on the management of energy, waste, materials, site and indoor air-quality.

Australia, which India has overtaken in recent years in green building space, has a Green Star rating for conservation of energy, water, air quality, transportation, material, emissions and innovations.

Britain has the Environmental Assessment Method of the Building Research Establishment, awarding points on health, energy, water, materials and land use, and pollution.

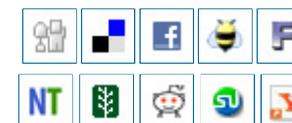
IGBC's Raghupathy refutes charges that LEEDS in India is not suitable because its concepts, such as

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airconditioning usage, is western.

"The principles of green buildings are universal and LEED itself is constantly evolving," Raghupathy said, adding that mindsets in energy-intensive commercial buildings are also changing. "The savings in cost of energy and water alone are attracting more commercial builders into the IGBC."

(END/2008)

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