

## Asian cities told to be more environmentally aware

Many of us have seen it at some point in our lives: A satellite photo of Asia at night, with countless dots of bright yellow lights indicating sprawling urban areas across the continent.

As the West is engulfed in a significant economic downturn, the Asia-Pacific region has emerged with new promise and huge potential, said Holcim executive committee member Paul Hugentobler.

As he looked at the map on one of his presentation slides during a forum on green and sustainable infrastructure in Singapore on Friday, he said, "in the future, these lights will only get brighter."

Speakers at the forum cited Jakarta, among other cities such as Dhaka in Bangladesh; Mumbai and Kolkata in India; Bangkok in Thailand; and Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam, as prime examples of emerging Asian cities that can take the world by storm in the near future.

However, as Hugentobler and other experts at the one-day international forum (held by Swiss-based building materials company Holcim) acknowledged, with Asian cities such as Jakarta experiencing increased urbanization and wealth, the responsibility of these cities' residents had also increased.

"In a region addicted to growth, themes such as the management of resources and energy as well as innovation and cost management must be taken into serious consideration," said Hugentobler, whose responsibility at Holcim includes the regions of South Asia and South East Asia minus the Philippines.

He cited messy bureaucratic red tape and a lack of leadership, "which is a result of the shortsightedness of politicians", as two main obstacles against a revolution to establish a sustainable urban area in Jakarta.

The Jakarta administration has set a target of 34.51 percent of the city's 662-square kilometers to be converted into green space by 2030. Currently, only 10.95 percent of Jakarta's open space is utilized for green areas, which fails to meet an earlier spatial planning target of reserving 13.9 percent of the city for green areas by the end of 2010.

In terms of green buildings, the Green Building Council Indonesia (GBCI) was established in 2008 as part of the global Green Building Council initiatives. Under its "green" rating system, 60 buildings are currently registered and 38 are in the process of being assessed.

Hugentobler suggested that youth must spearhead all attempts to forward the sustainable city agenda. "Using social media, young people must rise up and push the politicians [to implement sustainable city plans]. Change has to come." London-based professional services firm Arup principal Don Phillips, also a speaker at the forum, argued that citizens must be able to see the cities they lived in as places to relax, refresh and experience great Monday mornings, instead of places where offices were located.

"Therefore, we have got to have great places to go to [in our cities], to bring kids to, to have lots of fresh air at," he said in his speech. In order to do this, he continued, integrated and future-oriented transport and land use planning, strong public transport network, active government provision of public transport use, and control of private car ownership were musts.

He cited Bumi Serpong Damai (BSD) City in Serpong, Tangerang, just outside Jakarta, as one example of an urban area with commendable planning in the Asia Pacific region.