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Bharath Joshi, Bengaluru, DH News Service, Jul 29 2017, 1:58 IST



INYT file image for representation.

With seven cities in Karnataka, including Bengaluru, drawing up ambitious plans to use technology in governance under the Smart Cities Mission, the state government has formed a six-member panel comprising experts to ensure they are not just fancy announcements.

Belagavi, Davangere, Hubballi-Dharwad, Shivamogga, Mangaluru, Tumakuru and Bengaluru have been chosen under the Centre's Smart Cities Mission and each will get up to Rs 500 crore.

These cities have announced smart parking, smart water metres, app-based citizen service delivery, public Wi-Fi connectivity and other such technology-based projects. All of them will now need approval by a technical committee under the Karnataka Urban Infrastructure Development and Finance Corporation (KUIDFC), the nodal agency for the Smart City project.

The committee comprises sustainability expert Prof T V Ramachandra from the Indian Institute of Science, geographical information systems (GIS) expert S Rajagopalan from IIIT Bangalore (IIITB), C-DAC principal technical officer Annarao Kulkarni along with three government officials.

According to a government order issued by the Urban Development Department, the committee will have the authority to vet the concepts, review detailed project reports and accord technical sanction to them.

"We will push for technology that really enables good governance without letting the government to just sleep over it," said Prof Ramachandra, an ecologist who is at the forefront of the campaign to save lakes.

The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), for instance, has proposed 50 smart card-enabled public bicycle sharing points, 30 e-rickshaw stands, 35 e-toilets, water ATMs, 420 sensor-based smart dustbins and 50 designated vending kiosks - all connected to 1,250 smart telecom towers that will double up as streetlight poles. The city, like others chosen under the Smart City project, will get Wi-Fi connectivity.

"Our focus in the committee will be to make sure these technology projects are sustainable. Specifically, we will look at economic feasibility, environment friendliness and socio-cultural acceptability," said IIITB's Rajagopalan.

The panel is also expected to be mindful of past failures, especially with free Wi-Fi in public areas. A pilot of Wi-Fi hotspots in Bengaluru in 2014, including over a dozen access points on MG Road and Brigade Road, failed to take off because it was not feasible. "It was under-designed because of which internet speed was very slow. Also, like in most places around the world, public Wi-Fi has to be paid for by the municipality and authorities have to choose the right funding model," Rajagopalan said.