

An Online Course on Urban Futures in South and South-East Asia

An online course on “Urban Futures in South and Southeast Asia” will be jointly organised by the Calcutta Research Group (CRG) and the Center on Gender and Forced Displacement at the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), Bangkok, from 17 January to 7 March 2026, with 2-hour sessions held every Saturday.

Cities, one literary theorist has noted, always evoke thoughts of the future, whether of hope, or anxiety, or despondency, in light of the challenges of their times. The concept of the future is inherently ambiguous, as these challenges present themselves simultaneously as sources of vitality and as portents of decline. The notion of the urban future therefore resists stable definition and instead invites speculation: the future is not simply the absence of the present. With its indefinability, the future makes time itself possible. The idea of an urban future prompts us to speculate about temporality, but also to imagine collectively and to act together toward desirable futures. It does not suggest prediction or mastery over what lies ahead, nor resignation to despair. Rather, the urban future offers a critical lens through which to understand how cities exist, thrive, and negotiate difficulties, while also contending with fault lines, ruptures, and even collapse. It is both an emblem of uncertainty and a reflection on temporality.

There can be no single future in store for our cities, but rather multiple and contested futures. We do not simply wait for the future to arrive; we work on it in the present. In this sense, the future is not merely a temporal concept but a practice. Future making, marked by diverse and sometimes competing practices, becomes a field of contention and struggle. This is especially evident in cities of the South, with their colonial legacies, uneven trajectories of decolonisation and development, and their new logistical and ecological entanglements. The idea of the urban future thus invites us to think critically about how such practices unfold in cities today.

This online course on South and Southeast Asian cities will engage with several registers of the urban future, including, but not limited to:

- (a) The literary, artistic, and cultural imagination of a desirable city
- (b) The political histories of subaltern classes and their demands for a humane and just urban order
- (c) The experience of public disasters, whether climatic or epidemiological, and the solidarities of care and mutual protection that arise in response
- (d) The visions of planners and administrators shaped by intergovernmental aid, investment, and public–private partnerships
- (e) The presence of refugees, migrants, and outsiders whose contributions lend cities a plural and cosmopolitan character in tension with nativist claims
- (f) The evolution of an urban economy in place of the industrial economy, and the central role played by informal economies and public finance in shaping these trajectories.

There would be a total of 40 seats with 17 seats for participants from India/South Asia, 17 seats for those from South-East Asia, and 6 seats for those from outside the region. An international faculty of resource persons will guide the participants in their course assignments which may include creative segments.

The last date for receiving applications is **30th October 2025**. Applications will have to be accompanied by CV, one recommendation letter, and a statement of purpose. Application may be sent to – Priya Singh priya@ait.asia, Madhubanti Talukdar madhubanti@mcr.ac.in and Subhashree Rout subhashree@mcr.ac.in .

Selected participants will be informed by end November, 2025.

To learn more about the online course held in 2025, please access:

http://www.mcr.ac.in/Urban_Future_CIFAR/U

Participation Fee Structure

The course will follow a tiered fee structure that recognises the economic disparities between students from the Global South and the Global North.

Tier 1 (Subsidised): USD 40

For students from countries such as Myanmar, Nepal, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Laos, and Timor-Leste.

Approximate equivalents include: INR 3,300, THB 1,500, NPR 5,300, BDT 4,600, MMK 85,000, KHR 165,000, and LAK 850,000.

Tier 2 (Standard Global South): USD 60

For students from countries such as India, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka.

Approximate equivalents include: INR 5,000, THB 2,200, IDR 1,000,000, VND 1.5 million, PHP 3,500, and LKR 18,000.

Tier 3 (Global North): USD 200

For students from countries such as the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, European Union countries, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, South Korea, and Singapore.

Approximate equivalents include: INR 16,600, THB 7,300, EUR 180, GBP 155, CAD 270, AUD 300, JPY 29,000, KRW 270,000, and SGD 270.

Exchange rates are indicative and subject to minor variation at the time of payment.

Please note that scholarships are available for eligible candidates.