

## Construction in Delhi on pause as migrant workers hesitate to return to city, say developers

### Synopsis

Many labourers had to face a horrid time in Delhi when the city faced a severe shortage of oxygen and hospital beds. The Delhi government has allowed construction activity from May 31 but most of the sites have been unable to resume operations.



Most of the construction sites in Delhi are unable to start work as migrant labourers are scared of returning to the city, after the capital witnessed high infection rates and death count during the second Covid-19 wave, multiple real estate developers said.

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“They have seen the crisis and are now hesitant in coming back fearing the same during the third wave. Government must help the developers in bringing back the labourers,” said Pankaj Bajaj, managing director of Eldeco Infrastructure & Properties and president of the Delhi chapter of industry association Credai.

Eldeco is executing a commercial project in South Delhi’s Malviya Nagar.

The second lockdown has had devastating effects on the real estate sector which was already reeling due to construction stoppage, demand shrinkage and mounting liability of salary and interest payments.

It won’t be easy for the developers and construction players to reach the pre-pandemic levels anytime soon.

“Rising input costs and shortage of labour are going to be some challenges that would delay the pace of construction,” said Harish Sharma, executive director at REPL, an infrastructure consultancy firm.

“Keeping in mind past experiences of two lockdowns, the labourers may find it challenging to return to work. The shortage of labour is going to continue, till the time the situation across the country gets better, which may take 30 to 45 days,” Sharma said.

Also, movement of the workforce would take time as several states from where the majority of labourers come are still under lockdown-like restrictions.

“It has been a difficult time as the construction sector faces supply disruption and shortage of labour. With Delhi government’s announcement of opening up, things could take a month’s time to normalise. Authorities should also look into the possibilities of bringing back the labour, who are wary of coming to Delhi due to infection scare,” said Abhishek Bansal, executive director at the Pacific Group.

Nayan Raheja of Raheja Developers said since last year, the sector had always followed Covid guidelines that ensured no cases among the staff and labour working on sites.

“The focus of the developer community is to deliver projects on deadline, but the sector needs authorities’ support in challenging times,” he said.

The Uttar Pradesh chapter of the National Real Estate Development Council has also said construction would suffer for another six months at least, and even after that, it would take time to restore the material supply chain, and re-mobilise manpower and machines.