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## Chennai civic disaster, corporation lacks experts

CHENNAI: Bustling roads cave in without warning, neighbourhoods are flooded every time it rains, and encroached footpaths force pedestrians to leg it along broken and waterlogged roads. The city has turned into a civic disaster and Corporation of Chennai has had its epiphany: It has awoken to the fact that it lacks expertise.

Corporation officials said the spate of problems that accompanied the monsoon has made them aware of the need to create positions for fulltime professionals. These include posts for urban planners and experts in finance, transport, bridges and communication officers. It is also planning to form an IT team.

To be able to recruit professionals, the corporation may have to retrench or reassign employees. Every department of the civic body has prepared a list identifying mistakes in organisational structure and redundant jobs that can be eliminated.

Senior corporation officials are looking to increase the

workforce at the top level and shave it at the bottom and will seek the government's approval to introduce more senior posts in the hope that the professionals they hire will come up with the ideas they so sorely need to keep pace with the development of the city.

"We have few professional employees compared to the city's population," a senior corporation official said. "City municipalities in the West have a more professionals and they are responsible for smaller populations. We need to expand, particularly at the top level."

"We have a town planner but not an urban planner. We have no financial experts to advise us on optimal expenditure or how to raise capital. If we want exceptional roads, we need a transport planner," he said.

He said the civic body needs to create such senior positions for professionals just like private companies. "Every department has come up with a wish list, but we will be able to finalise the posts and make a representation to the government only after we decide how to meet the additional expenditure that an increase in professional recruits would involve."

Engineers of the civic body are currently undergoing a six month certified course designed by Institute for Transport and Development Policy (ITDP) and Anna University. Many corporation officials say they are forced to handle multiple portfolios and are unable to focus on routine work. The

superintending engineer of bus routes in the roads department, for instance, is also in charge of bridges, solid waste management, public health and mechanical engineering.

The corporation has taken up a Rs 1,500 crore project to lay roads build footpaths in the city but doesn't have a dedicated superintending engineer for most roads. The lack of an engineer for the solid waste management department, about which there are the most complaints, and the bridges department, which is planning 24 flyovers, is also sources of concern.