

Delhi can't outlive the river it is so desperate to choke

Metro Matters

Shivani Singh, Metro Editor



The unfortunate story of the Yamuna keeps getting worse. Last week, the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) had put out a public notice in newspapers asking for suggestions and objections to the proposed modification in its zone 'O', a highly protected river precinct where no construction whatsoever is allowed.

The DDA's bid to change the land use is to accommodate the Delhi Transport Corporation's Millennium Depot that was built as a temporary structure to park buses which ferried athletes during the 2010 Commonwealth Games. While the sporting event was over within a fortnight, the depot stayed put.

Now, armed with a court order, the government wants to change the land use from a river zone to transportation. In 2011, the Delhi Jal Board found that the Yamuna flood plains were capable of providing as much as 250 million gallons of water per day (MGD), almost one-third of the city's demand.

The study also concluded that if the government fails to check the blatant encroachment on the 97 square kilometres of the Yamuna features in 'O' zone in the Delhi Master Plan 2021 that has to remain untouched by urbanisation. But its sanctity exists only on paper. Akshardham temple, Metro stations and loco-sheds, Delhi secretariat, Ring Road bypass — each time a structure was constructed on the riverbank, the government regularised it as the last exception. Yet, new ones keep coming up.

Other than the wooded Aravali ridge, the Yamuna floodplains are the only spacious open stretch available in Delhi. Unfortunately, it is also the city's biggest dump. Recently, a commit-

tee formed by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) inspected the riverbank and found 10,000 truckloads of waste piled up.

According to the Centre for Science and Environment, Delhi produces more than 445 crore litre of waste every day, of which only 147.8 crore litre is treated. The rest flows into the river already choked by highly toxic fly ash dumped by the city's thermal plants. A study by the geological department of Delhi University found that Rajghat and Indraprastha power plants were releasing 7.5 tonnes of arsenic into the river every year.

The Yamuna with its vast sand aquifer that runs 2km wide and nearly 40 metres deep along the 48-km stretch of the river along Delhi is also its best insurance against water scarcity. In 2011, the Delhi Jal Board found that the Yamuna flood plains were capable of providing as much as 250 million gallons of water per day (MGD), almost one-third of the city's demand.

The study also concluded that if the government fails to check the blatant encroachment on the 97 square kilometres of the

river's flood plains in the Capital, it would be equivalent to an economic loss of ₹50 crore per square kilometre annually.

But there is a lot more to fear than mere loss of water: In 2009, Istanbul saw one of its worst flash floods that killed 31 people. The high-density concrete construction along the riverbanks and insufficient drainage system of Istanbul prevented the rainwater from reaching the sea through natural channels. The Turkish prime minister called it "the river's revenge".

While Istanbul's tragedy has more in common with what a stifled Mithi did to Mumbai in 2005, Delhi is the seat of the highest level of urbanisation in India and faces a grimmer future. It is located in seismic zone IV, the second-highest earthquake hazard zone in India. The high-density population areas on the Yamuna riverbed — from northeast Delhi to Noida, Okhla and Faridabad in Haryana — are particularly vulnerable because structures, legal and illegal, have been built on weak foundation of soft alluvial soil.

Our soft policies that encourage and regularise illegal riverbed constructions are only invitations to major urban tragedies. Can't blame the river for manmade natural disasters.



■ The DDA's bid to change the land use is to accommodate the DTC Millennium Depot that was built for the 2010 CWG. HT PHOTO

DDA to build five new sub-cities in Capital

COMING UP Sub-cities in urban extension or rural zones to be set up with help of land-pooling policy

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NEW DELHI: In a few years, Delhi is expected to get five new sub-cities on the lines of Dwarka and Rohini, thanks to the Delhi Development Authority's (DDA) new land-pooling policy.

Since 1961, DDA's policy has been to acquire large tracts of land to develop housing but that approach hasn't been able to meet the city's soaring demand for affordable housing. The land-pooling policy allows developers or large landholders to pool in land for development and get back a share in lieu of it.

"The reason we have been unable to develop the new sub-cities is the shortage of land. Acquiring land is a long and problematic process and that is where land pooling could help," said a senior DDA official who didn't wish to be named.

In the last decade, the DDA has been able to provide just 25,000 housing units approximately for a city with a population of 1.67 crore. The new sub-cities are expected to provide

housing to about 70 lakh more people.

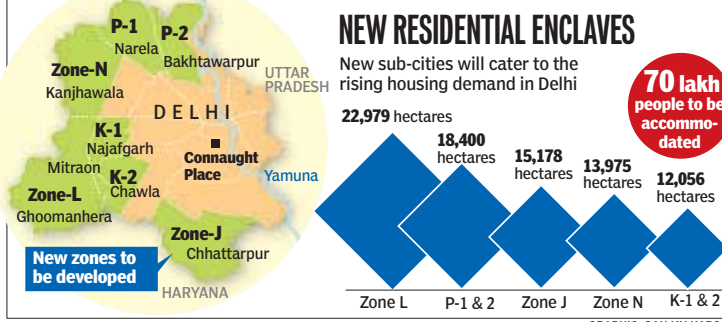
According to the land-pooling policy, private developers will be able to retain 40% of developed land (for areas between 3 hectares and 20 hectares) and 60% of land (for areas above 20 hectares). "The land owners and developers will be able to get back developed land that they can further sell or use, as long as they adhere to the regulations. We expect large number of land owners to come forward, which would provide an impetus for the development of new sub-cities," he said.

The DDA has come out with a public notice recently, asking for suggestions or objections on the new policy. These would go to a board of enquiry and then come back for approval to the authority, after which it will have to be approved by the Urban Development Ministry and notified.

As per the Master Plan of Delhi 2021, zones A to H are urban areas and zones J to P (I and II) are earmarked as urban extension areas or rural areas.



■ DDA has been acquiring large tracts of land for housing.



Soon, accident victims to get free treatment

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GURGAON: In a unique initiative to bring down accident fatalities on National Highway-8 and provide immediate medical attention to victims, the Ministry of Surface Transport (MoST) in collaboration with All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), state health departments of Delhi, Haryana and Rajasthan and private sector insurance firms is going to launch a pilot project.

The aim is to rescue accident victims on the stretch between New Delhi and Jaipur and offer immediate and cashless treatment to them.

A number of private hospitals with trauma centre facilities and expertise in the field of critical care along the 261-km stretch between Delhi and Jaipur will be empanelled by a private sector insurance firm.

The proposed plan envisages creating a Rapid Response Team (RRT) to ensure immediate transfer of the accident victims to nearby private hospitals and providing initial crucial treatment without waiting for the police or relatives of the victims to arrive and offer financial help.

As many as 438 people died and 113 were injured in several accidents on the Gurgaon stretch of NH-8 last year.

28-year-old constable stabs parents after argument, held

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NEW DELHI: A 28-year-old Delhi Police constable was arrested on Sunday for allegedly murdering his parents after a heated argument. Constable Neeraj Kumar allegedly stabbed his middle-aged mother and father to death at his southwest Delhi residence on Saturday evening.

Police said Kumar joined the force in 2008 and was currently posted at the security wing of the Patiala House district court complex.

"The murders were triggered by their son's frustration at their constant and 'needless nitpick-

ing," said RK Pandey, additional DCP (southwest).

Pandey added that the murder came to light after the constable's neighbours spotted the bodies in a plot next to his house around 6:30am on Sunday. "The constable has been arrested," the additional DCP added.

According to the police, the incident occurred sometime around dinner on Saturday evening after an ugly spat.

After having stabbed both his parents to death, the police claimed, Kumar carried their bodies up to the first floor from the ground floor from where he flung them out into an adjacent plot from an open window.

"Apparently furious at being hit by his father Dharam Singh, Kumar got his hands on a knife from the kitchen and attacked him," said an officer. As blood gushed out from her husband's body, Kamlesh rushed to help and tried to restrain Neeraj. However, the furious constable attacked his mother too and stabbed her.

The police said Neeraj, during questioning, claimed that he had been seething with anger ever since his parents 'drove' his first wife with their endless complaints and constant bickering. They were, he claimed, trying to do the same thing to his second wife as well.

NEW INITIATIVE TO BOOST NEIGHBOURHOOD HOSPITALS

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NEW DELHI: It's an effort to save the small neighbourhood hospitals so that people can have access to affordable healthcare.

Imperia Health Pvt. Ltd., a first of its kind hospitals operations management company, is taking the initiative to upgrade the mid-sized neighbourhood hospitals that are being nearly eaten up by the competition from bigger corporate hospitals.

In a panel discussion organised on Sunday, medical experts talked about the need for saving small hospitals, having a capacity of 50-150 beds.

"Not everyone can afford getting treated at a big private hospital. But this doesn't mean the poor don't have the right to quality healthcare. Our aim is to strengthen these small hospitals, who are not able to cope up quality-wise, so that people have an option," said Ashwajit Singh, chairman and MD, IPE Global, who is a founder of Imperia Health.

To begin with, the company has decided to assist two hospitals — Noida-based Vinayak Hospital and Karnal-based Arpana. "We are not taking away ownership. We will only provide assistance to upgrade them with a better medical team, infrastructure, etc," said Dr Harsh Mahajan, eminent radiologist and a board member of Imperia Health.

The company has experts across departments and can guide in human resource policies to recruit and train staff and structuring finances among other things.

"Healthcare in India is in a transition mode, where neighbourhood physician has been replaced by speciality hospitals. In most cases, people who come to tertiary care hospitals don't require super-specialty treatment. We need to change that," said Dr Naresh Trehan, eminent cardiac surgeon and founder, Medanta-The Medicity.

We will only provide assistance to upgrade these hospitals.
HARSH MAHAJAN
radiologist

Expressing anger



■ BJP president Rajnath Singh with Delhi BJP president Vijay Goel and other senior leaders during the Aakrosh Rally held on Sunday in Dwarka. VIPIN KUMAR/HT PHOTO

Proposal to form medical board for Bhullar reaches L-G

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NEW DELHI: The state health department has forwarded a proposal to Lieutenant Governor Tejendra Khanna to seek his approval for the constitution of an independent medical board to ascertain whether death row convict Devinderpal Singh Bhullar's mental condition allows him to be hanged.

Bhullar, whose petition for commutation of his death sentence was rejected by the Supreme Court recently, is lodged at the Institute of Human Behaviour & Allied Sciences (IHBAS) for over two years for treatment of a psychiatric ailment. The jail manual requires death row convicts suffering from psychiatric ailments to be examined by a medical board.

"The state health department has forwarded the proposal for the setting up of a special medical board to evaluate Bhullar's mental condition to Delhi's Lieutenant-Governor for approval," said a government source. The source said, "Once the approval comes, the board will be constituted with around three-four experts from different hospitals, including the All India Institute of Medical

The medical board will now examine him to determine if he is fit to be hanged.
SOURCE
Tihar jail

Sciences, as its members."

According to the source, the apex court had dealt with the issue of Bhullar's ailment in context of a final decision on commuting the death penalty. "The medical board will now examine him to determine if he is fit to be hanged," said the source.

Before his admission to IHBAS, Bhullar was lodged at a solitary cell fitted with a closed-circuit television camera at Tihar prison's sub-jail 3. His cell was located close to the cell of 2001 Parliament terror attack case death convict Mohammed Afzal Guru who was hanged on February 9.

According to IHBAS's director Dr Nimesh G. Desai, Bhullar has a psychiatric ailment—depression with psychotic features — and has suicidal tendencies. Bhullar had allegedly tried to hang himself in a bathroom around 10 months ago but he was due to IHBAS's surveillance system.

MAN SHOT DEAD, FATHER INJURED BY NEIGHBOUR OVER DISPUTE

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NEW DELHI: A 34-year-old man was shot dead and his father seriously injured when their neighbour allegedly opened fire at them at the staff quarters of a government hospital on Sunday night.

The incident took place in the staff quarters of Lady Hardinge Hospital around 10pm and the deceased has been identified as Kailash.

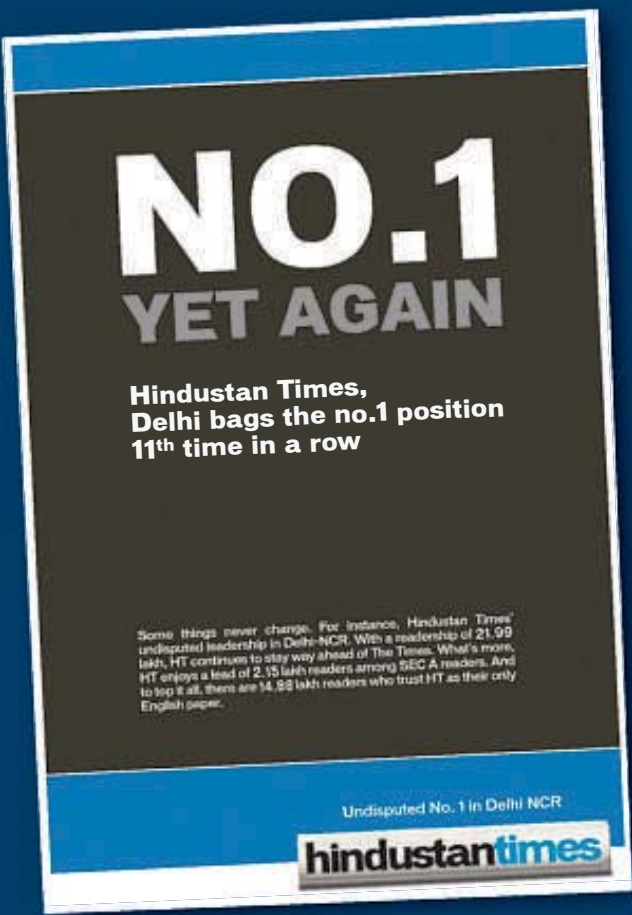
His father Subhash, 54, is seriously injured and undergoing treatment.

According to a senior police official, the father-son duo had a long-standing dispute with their neighbour Balkrishna and his son Manoj.

"On Sunday night, Balkrishna and Manoj along with some other men came to Subhash's house and entered into an argument. Following this, they opened fire and Kailash died on the spot. Subhash suffered grievous injuries," the official said.

While Balkrishna was arrested by the police, Manoj and others fled the spot. Efforts are now on to nab the absconding accused, the police said.

INDIA'S FIRST RECYCLED AD



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