

In Delhi's dark zones, councillors can't spend... even if they want to

MCD cannot develop most facilities in unauthorised colonies, and councillors cannot spend civic body funds here, leaving some municipal representatives less equal than others

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NEW DELHI: The Capital will, on December 7, get 250 new councillors, all of whom will be equally tasked with improving the civic situation in their wards — from paving streets to flattening landfills. But some councillors will be less equal than others.

Take Jitender Kumar, for instance.

Between 2017 and 2022, Kumar was confronted with a curious problem. His Sangam Vihar C ward, with 67,314 residents that live in the packed lanes of what is often dubbed the largest unauthorised cluster in Asia, had poles for street lights, but no bulbs in them. He attempted to raise this issue with a standing committee but was given a response that stumped him — municipality funds cannot be used in unauthorised areas.

Of the 250 municipal wards in Delhi, around a third are largely just unauthorised colonies. So, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) cannot develop streets or drains, develop parks or build community halls in these areas.

This puts the roughly four million residents of these colonies in a conundrum — pick a municipal representative who has vowed to improve roads, schools, health facilities in the area, but who will be unable to fulfil these promises, no matter how much he or she wants to.

In unauthorised colonies across the city, participation in the elections often eventually means little for residents. Most of the work in these neighbourhoods is done by the Delhi State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation (DSIIDC) or the flood control department, both of which are unelected bodies.

This means that around 80 of Delhi's 250 councillors are virtually powerless to drown out the administrative apathy that has

Unauthorised colonies

Unauthorised colonies in Delhi have been in existence right from the time the Capital's planned development started in 1957

1,797
UNAUTHORISED COLONIES IN DELHI

● One-third of Delhi lives in sub-standard housing

4 million
ESTIMATED POPULATION IN UNAUTHORISED COLONIES

70-80
WARDS COMPLETELY UNAUTHORISED, AS PER ESTIMATES

GROWTH IN URBAN POPULATION



Councillors can't use their area development funds for unauthorised colonies, while departments such as the engineering wing can't undertake developmental work, or construct drains, lay roads, etc

dogged their neighbourhoods, inhabited mostly by lower income group families, who live either in slum clusters, or slum redevelopment colonies. Homes in these areas are packed cheek-to-jowl, water and power supply is erratic, while access to quality health care is largely a pipe dream.

Jai Prakash, a former mayor of the erstwhile North MCD, said this problem should have been solved when the civic body was reunified this May.

"Ambedkar Nagar, the Sangam Vihar belt in the south, parts of outer Delhi, Palam, Matiala, Nangloi belt, New Ashok Nagar belt, Gandhi Nagar in the east are completely unauthorised. Ideally, this should have been sorted out in the unification process, with amendment in bye-laws and increasing the power of elected councillors," Prakash said.

"Hopefully, the reform will continue after the elections."

Councillors of such wards have repeatedly raised the issue of their disempowerment, both in the house and in standing committee meetings, but the matter is yet to be resolved. Unauthorised colo-

nies have dotted Delhi since the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) was set up in 1957, marking the inception of the Capital's planned development. Since DDA was unable to construct enough low-cost housing units, and large-scale migration from other states continued, such settlements continued to crop up. Since then, the regularisation of unauthorised colonies has been a routine poll promise, but has still to be implemented completely.

In 2006, the Supreme Court had also ruled that residents of unauthorised colonies should be provided basic civic amenities.

Prakash said all political parties should put their heads together to solve the limbo that such councillors find are forced into. "We had held a special joint house session on the issue of unauthorised colonies a couple of years back, but no resolution could be found," he said.

The problem has been unresolved, he said, as purely regularising these colonies does not fall under the jurisdiction of the civic body, even as the urban development department and DDA have

been involved in the process separately.

Problem faced across political spectrum

The Delhi Municipal Corporation Act is clear that the municipality cannot use funds in unauthorised colonies, said former mayor Nirmal Jain.

"This is a statutory problem. The Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (Dusib) looks after slums and JJ clusters, and DSIIDC works in unauthorised colonies," Jain said.

In south Delhi, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Prem Chauhan, who represented unauthorised areas in Dakshinapuri, said, "Over the last three years, the BJP has been arguing that these colonies have been authorised and approved by the DDA under the Prime Minister's Unauthorised Colonies in Delhi Awas Adhikar Yojana (PM-Uday), but if this were true, the MCD should be able to undertake work in these areas."

The PM-Uday scheme was introduced in the run up to 2020 Delhi assembly elections and empowered people to secure ownership rights to their properties. However, under this scheme, the status of the land — authorised or unauthorised — has remained the same.

"If legal problems exist, the resolution should have been passed by the house and sent to the lieutenant governor to extend the ambit of municipal services in these unauthorised wards," Chauhan said.

The problem is even more biting in east Delhi, the erstwhile civic body of which itself buckled under the strain of bankruptcy and corruption.

Budget documents reveal only 13% of the geographical area across the Yamuna has approved colonies. The rest, 87%, are unauthorised and, as a result, lack even basic infrastructure and services.

This, according to former municipal leaders of the erstwhile East Delhi Municipal Corporation (EDMC), goes some way towards explaining why trifurcation of the MCD in 2012 did not bring with it the kind of civic reprieve residents hoped for.

Shyam Sunder Aggarwal, a former EDMC mayor, said author-

ities suffered from a financial crunch because areas under it were largely unplanned.

"In Shahdara North, almost the entire area is unplanned. There are wards that generate just ₹1.25-2 lakh in revenue in a year," Aggarwal said.

A municipal official from the engineering department said they were powerless to help residents in these areas. "We receive many requests to approve unauthorised areas, but can do nothing," said the official, asking not to be named. "Even minor tasks, like repairing a small bridge on a drain, requires a lengthy process that starts at the local level, and coordination with DSIIDC, the MLA and a host of officers."

AK Jain, former DDA commissioner (planning) and an urban planning expert, said courts have been explicit about providing all basic services like sewage and roads in unauthorised colonies.

"The process for regularisation of colonies is already on and once it is completed, any practical difficulties being faced at the practical level in undertaking development works by the MCD will be removed," he said.

Past exceptions have been made with a tacit agreement between the MCD and the state and central governments, Jagdish Mangam, former BJP leader and MCD works committee chairman till 2012, said.

"For instance, just before the 2010 Commonwealth Games, lots of development work was undertaken through the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission as the image of our country was at stake," he said. "Similarly, the flood department was authorised to work in these areas after the Lalita Park building collapse in 2010, which claimed 71 lives. The area was located in the floodplains of the Yamuna, which became the pretext of using the irrigation and flood control department in these areas."

Kumar, from Sangam Vihar C ward, said that a councillor is the most immediate level of representation for the people, and all complaints come at this level. "The Capital should not have a system in which one public representative is unequal to his counterpart," he said.

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RWAs could get more power if CM has his way

MALLICA JOSHI
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 29

DELHI CHIEF Minister Arvind Kejriwal said Tuesday that Resident Welfare Associations in the capital will be given the status of 'mini-councillors' if the Aam Aadmi Party is voted to power.

In Delhi, RWAs are a phenomenon of gated colonies and are elected by homeowners. They are responsible for security arrangements, beautification and greening of public areas and managing control of community halls and spaces.

"If voted into power, AAP will launch a scheme called Janta Chalayegi MCD. Presently, to get any work done, people have to run after leaders from pillar to post. Under this scheme, this system will end. Now, the people will make decisions and the government will work for them. Under this scheme, an RWA will be given mini-parshad (councillor) status; they will be given all power to address the issues of their locality. Funds will be allocated to the RWAs," Kejriwal said.

The move is politically significant as RWAs hold sway in the city's planned, authorised areas, especially in DDA colonies.

What are the contours of the scheme?

While senior party leaders said that a step-by-step roadmap of the scheme is not ready yet, it will entail RWAs being in touch with their area MLAs regarding any work that is to be done inside the society.

RWAs will tell the MLA about their problems and coordinate with them, government officials said. Depending on the work, MLAs will allocate money to RWAs using their MLALAD fund of Rs 4 crore per year.

"Once the project is discussed and sanctioned, the RWA will have to ensure that it is executed in a time-bound manner and a report is submitted to the MLA. A fund cap for each RWA has not been decided yet," said an official.

What kind of work can RWAs seek money for?

RWAs, which charge maintenance or development charges from residents, can approach MLAs for work regarding internal roads, beautification of parks and common areas, cleanliness and other issues such as sewer and water. Maintenance of internal roads, parks and cleanliness come under the jurisdiction of civic bodies.

"Our main aim is to make the people of Delhi leaders. People should be the councillor and CM in the state. Governance will be handed over to the public, they will run the government through

RWAs," Kejriwal said on Tuesday.

What was the need for a new system?

According to officials, councillors would not be able to act on hundreds of requests from residents in their wards and RWAs would act as helping hands. "Councillors may not be able to handle all the complaints. The fund allocated to them (around Rs 50 lakh) is also far less than that for MLAs and that has to be used for small streets and roads in their area, cleanliness, and other civic issues. This scheme will give people a direct line with the MLA," said an official.

Asked about setting accountability and answerability, Kejriwal said, "A proper system will be set up both online and offline. It will be completely transparent."

This is not the first time the government has tied up with resident associations.

In 2003, the then Sheila Dikshit government had launched the Bhagidari scheme with RWAs, wherein Dikshit would attend web meetings with them, alongside government officials where grievances were raised and addressed. The initiative won the 2005 UN Public Service award. Over the years, however, it fizzled out and stopped once the Congress government was voted out in 2013.

पेड़ पर फंदे से लटका मिला 25 साल के युवक का शव

■ विस, शाहबाद डेयरी : शाहबाद डेयरी इलाके में सोमवार शाम 25 साल के एक युवक ने पेड़ पर फंदा लगाकर सदिग्ध परिस्थितियों में जान दे दी। हालांकि कोई स्पूसाइड नोट नहीं मिला है। छानबीन के आधार पर पुलिस ने इसे खुदकुशी बताया है। पुलिस ने के लिए भेज दिया है। पुलिस मृतक की पहचान करने में जुटी है। शव रेहिणी सेक्टर-35 के पास खाली पड़े डीडीए ग्राउंड में एक पेड़ पर लटका हुआ था।