

The Indian EXPRESS

# EXPRESS Newsline

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EXPRESS Newsline ■ NEW DELHI ■ WEDNESDAY ■ DECEMBER 4, 2002

NEWS

## Mr Ananth Kumar, let me work and let courts decide

SUDHIR VOHRA

**A**NANTH Kumar is at it once again! This time, under the influence of his party colleague and friend Madan Lal Khurana, he has put his foot in his mouth by endorsing him in a press statement on issues which are being adjudicated upon by different division benches of Supreme Court.

Four of the issues dealt with in the statement — changing of land use from industrial to commercial, allowing residences to be used as shops, changing land use by paying a nominal fee and

the Malhotra Committee recommendations — are being looked into by SC benches and judgements are awaited. In all these matters, the stand taken by Ananth Kumar's ministry is contrary to the noise made in the press statement. Some other issues, like regularisation of unauthorised colonies, are before Delhi High Court.

It is okay in our flawed democracy for politicians to say different things to different people and at different fora on the same issue and on the same day. They are allowed to confuse the common man with promises they cannot keep. But we can

pause to examine the consequences such irresponsible statements can have.

Firstly, it's the national Capital which gives the lead in such matters. Whatever good or bad takes place in Delhi is quickly replicated by other states and their civic bodies. By usurping the job of the town planner and the architect, Messrs Khurana and Ananth Kumar are doing irreparable damage to my profession.

The issues that are being discussed are all techno-social issues that have to do with building a healthy built environment in the city. Arbitrarily adding a floor

across the city would add about 25 per cent more to existing dwellings. While our politicians may want to dole this out as a sop, they perhaps do not know that this is not feasible from the point of view of engineering services and infrastructure.

Allowing shops and showrooms to operate in residential areas besides not good architecture is abetment to crime, theft, parking chaos, traffic jams etc. The same is true about allowing showrooms to operate on land meant for industry.

Examples of better (though not perfect) urban governance are available

right outside the Capital's territory — both the satellite towns of Gurgaon and Faridabad have very little land use abuse, the roads allow traffic to flow unhindered and street setbacks as

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well as building line setbacks are respected by the citizen and monitored well by the municipalities. Not too far away in Chandigarh there is another example of good urban governance which has been combined with good

architecture and town planning. The rules were set by Le Corbusier and his team and followed by his successors who built Panchkula and Mohali.

It is the combination of

good planning/good design and good urban governance which makes a city or a town. One cannot do without the other. Good design and planning without good implementation and governance is of no use. Which is

why we have town planners and architects performing both roles — some design while others join the regulatory bodies and municipalities world over.

Messrs Khurana and Ananth Kumar have an eye on the forthcoming elections and, unfortunately, the Congress too doesn't want to be left behind. The issues are now getting graver. Our politicians are encroaching on professional space. And that can lead to doom.

*(Sudhir Vohra is an architect and a commentator on issues arising out of urban chaos)*

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