

Unmaking Gurgaon: Commerce trades a city

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THE convention of 30 RWAs of Gurgaon to discuss the problems of power and water infrastructure in their region needs to be seen from a larger perspective — that of a planned development of a new town being destroyed by illogical and illegal permissions given for what is now called CLU — a change in land use.

The problems of lack of water and of both quantity and quality of power in Gurgaon's new residential areas have multiplied because of the CLU syndrome. Even a cursory examination of the town planning work done in New Gurgaon would show that the professional planners followed some very elementary principles of town planning.

Firstly, Sector 29 in Gurgaon has been planned as a City Center quite similar to the planning principles learnt from Le Corbusier's Chandigarh experiment, as also from the Gandhi-

nagar experience: Called the Millennium City Centre, this huge tract of land is surrounded on all sides with very wide access roads, it is set well away from the main National Highway 8 (which speeds to Jaipur), as also from the main residential sectors of the new town.

Sector 32, a few blocks away, has been set aside for institutional buildings and most of the other sectors are also well defined. However, the three-km stretch between Mehrauli and Gurgaon is an example of how CLU can ruin a planned developmental effort.

This road is important because it is an artery connecting New Gurgaon to South Delhi. It starts from the Qutub Minar area, and is the shortest link to New Gurgaon. Shortest, but not necessarily the fastest: Hour-long waits at traffic junctions on this road are now common.

This is the stretch which violates some of the basics of planned development: Pockets of land which are right next to residential areas developed 20

Residents say malls, cinemas hurting them



years ago have now been converted into commercial plots. The result is the huge concentration of malls which now

sprout up on these plots — with walls abutting group housing residences, individual houses in the region, and even EWS hous-

ing. The result is, of course, that facilities meant for these residential colonies are being shared with these power-hungry monsters.

These buildings abut right onto the main road — the Mehrauli Gurgaon link — now fashionably called the MG Road. There is no service lane, no slip road, no green setback, nor any noise cushion. Nothing.

The resultant mess of traffic is there for all to realise now. And right opposite the Garden Estate area, more such commercial developments are now being constructed — all due to the agricultural lands being converted to commercial use by the CLU process — a process driven by political and financial considerations, and not by sound town planning principles.

What is perhaps, not so visible is the utter lack of construction in the space allocated for the City Center — Sector 29. Ironically, this "millennium City Center" has elements inspired from Le Corbusier in toto — it includes a "leisure valley" — a la

Chandigarh.

When Corbusier laid out Chandigarh, he used available natural ravines to create a green "leisure valley" as a buffer between the residential sectors (Sector 16) and the City Center (Sector 17) — both to reduce the congestion as well as to seclude the noise and activity which every city center is bound to create. In a similar manner, a blue board on the NH 8 proclaims the existence of a leisure valley and the Millennium City Center.

But that is about where the development stops.

A visit there shall reveal that practically no development has taken place in the area planned for it. All the commercial fun and frolic has moved to the CLU center — the Mehrauli-Gurgaon stretch. There are no cinemas in the City Center, no shopping malls, and no large commercial buildings. None. The place is barren — only a maze of well laid out roads and gardens.

Quite different, of course, to

how Chandigarh was developed 50 years ago — the Chandigarh City Center was built with cinema halls, shopping rows, the state library and office spaces soon as the city was laid out.

It is not uncommon for even owners of institutional land to find that suddenly, one fine day, something never planned for when they bought the land, springs up before their buildings. Decisions on real estate are long term, and such surprises hurt. And the reported reaction of the RWAs is another indication of such hurt.

Perhaps the CLU curse on planned city development can only be removed by a residents' movement. The 30 RWAs of Gurgaon, who have been exercising themselves over the problems of water and power, are perhaps bothered about the current and immediate issues confronting them. But they also need to bother about the larger curse — the CLU syndrome.

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