

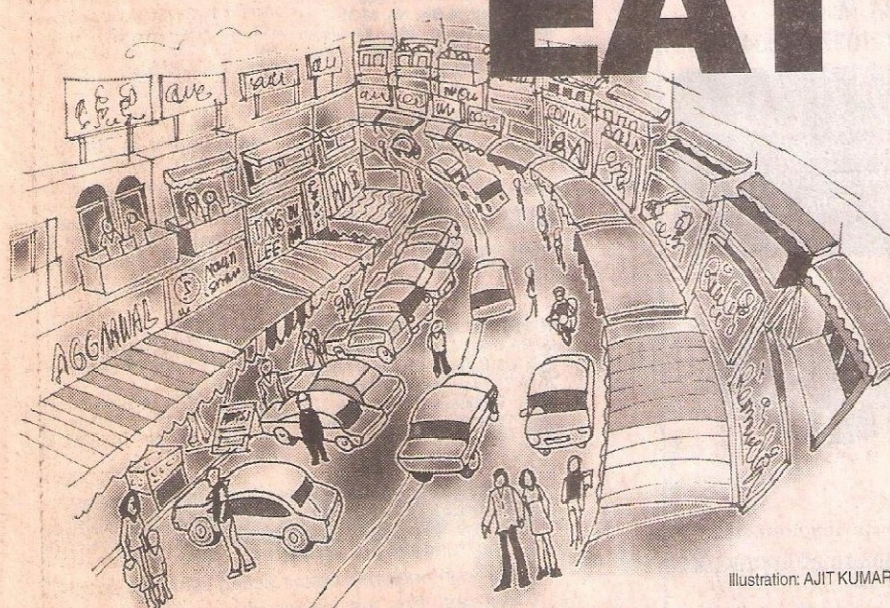
SUDHIR VOHRA

THE term 'mixed land use' has suddenly become fashionable in the Capital's coffee bar and mocktail society. More so at a time when it is clear to all that urban governance reforms are now on the horizon—perhaps for no other reason that the urban mess we live in most of our towns and cities has now begun to hurt. Perhaps this is a good enough time to go into the history of the term, into why it was popular at one time, and its relevance today.

To begin with, mixed land use means an urban development norm which allows a plot of land to be used for more than one use. Its derivatives and usage goes back to medieval times.

In most early town developments, security concerns created the Walled City

SHOP WHERE YOU DROP WHERE YOU LIVE WHERE YOU EAT



Is Greater Kailash a market or a residential area? Unplanned mixed land use is causing urban disaster

model, with gates controlling access to the outside world. Early cities developed for reasons of trade and commerce and the mixed land use concept developed—quite simply—because it was convenient for the owner to sell his wares from a shop on the ground floor, and to reside on the floors above.

The examples of Chandni Chowk in Delhi, parts of original London, Prague, and even the island city of Bombay, are typical of these developments.

In those times, the mode of transport was slow and the volumes were small. But the automobile changed all that. It

needed more space in the street to turn than the horse; it created noise and pollution, and was a faster mode of transport.

THE mixed land use concept was popular even in Delhi up to the mid 1950s—Connaught Place is one such example: shops below, and residences on the upper floors. Shops have their entrances in the front, while the residences have them on the rear street (the Mews as known in London).

The pre-1962 development of Delhi followed the pattern. At one time, it was a good way to ensure both occupation as

well as commercial activity. But the crux of the concept was that the zones and locations where mixed land use was allowed was a planned area.

Mixed land use, has never been allowed to be created wherever the user wants to do it himself. On the other hand, it is a known principle of town planning that the sanctity of a planned development must be retained. People buy land and build property with the knowledge that it shall be built for a purpose. Changing land use arbitrarily or allowing it to be misused is a basic violation of town planning principles.

It is true that market dynamics have changed over the last few decades. There is a larger demand for commercial space—that is why we have the Mall mania now—but such demands can only be addressed by redevelopment exercises wherein existing zones can be re-planned keeping local needs in mind.

It is also true that there is an increased demand for neighbourhood facilities. If they are not planned for in the very beginning of the town planning process, they tend to grow in a fungal manner around available spaces. This is exactly what is happen-

ing in Greater Kailash and Defence Colony. But allowing

mixed land use in an unplanned manner will have disastrous results.

It is already a much abused term. The effects of arbitrary misuse of land use is evident in the urban chaos. The difference between residential, commercial, industrial and other land uses is now becoming more expressed as the common man is reacting to this abuse.

In the absence of any Central Government legislation on the issue, it remains to be seen when our state shall wake up to realise that we are creating an irreversible mess of our towns and cities. A mess which shall cost a lot to undo.

The author is a Delhi-based architect

guest
column

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