

The government should get its 'Act' together—specifically, the National Highways Act 2003—against land sharks

Preventing highway robbery

The government has been proactively preventing abuse of lands abutting the Jaipur-Ajmer highway and the national highway in Sonapat, Haryana. Coupled with National Urban Renewal Mission initiatives, such moves augur well for the future.

There is also news that the central government will regulate land use along the new orbital national highway connecting Sonapat (in

use.

Perhaps the recent National Highways (Land and Traffic) Act of 2003 - yes, it is only two years old - has escaped attention. This Act, though new—therefore untested and raw—has provisions which can, perhaps, be exercised to ensure greedy land sharks out to make a killing by reselling to the gullible public, nor get the land use changed arbitrar-



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(500m on each side) is maintained as a no-construction zone along national highways.

Orbital roads

When Britain embarked on building its road infrastructure in the post-war era, new statutes were enacted to ensure that the peripheries of the new highways were regulated before construction began in earnest. Orbital roads, built around existing townships, ensured that new town development was restrained and regulated within the delegated lines, and new towns were built as satellite developments wherever needed.

Such statutes have ensured that uncontrolled construction does not crop up wherever a new highway is built. The Land Acquisition Act of 1894 may be one cumbersome way to fight the malaise, but to cure the cancer, we need to have a look at statutes like the National Highways (Land and Traffic) Act (13 of 2003), and to prevent such land scams in future.

The National Highway Act 2003 is a Central Act. Thus it is applicable

The world over, a strip of land almost a kilometre wide is kept as a no-construction zone along highways

the north) to Manesar (in the west) and then through to Agra. This new link, talked about for some years, is already in the anvil, and can relieve pressure of traffic passing through Delhi to the northern states. What is heartening is that the central government will regulate land use along the proposed national highway even before work starts on the ground.

Compulsory acquisition

The Land Acquisition Act is designed for speedy application, and is liberally used by the government to prevent land abuse. But, as



Act which has been enacted for "control of land within the National Highways, right of way and traffic moving on the National Highway, and also for removal of unauthorised occupation thereon." Within this expansive mandate, it provides

aerial view

Sudhir Vohra



Another chapter in this statute defines how it can prevent unauthorised occupation of highway land. Unregulated and unplanned construction activity along the newly built

equally to all states, without fear or favour, as they like to say in legal jargon. Perhaps—at last—urban design, town planning and regional planning shall become important