

authority and loopholes in various laws and acts lead to a lack of compliance
s. It's time we changed the frameworks

Tails urban management?

other parts of the country. In fact, the Punjab Improvement Trust Act of 1922 still prevails in some parts of Punjab even today, more than eight decades after its institution.

Significance

Why are these seemingly mundane historical facts and figures important today? Mainly because not enough attention has been focussed on the various confusions that

cities and towns. This leads to a lack of compliance of urban laws and connivance between municipal officials and market operators, as well as between state governments and land developers. The fact that residents welfare associations (RWAs) and citizens' associations are now waking up to the realisation that our cities and towns are not good enough is yet another reason for the need to address legal frameworks which are meant to govern urban habitats.

It may be that land being a state subject as per the guidelines of the Constitution, the Central government has not focussed enough attention on laws concerning the built environment of cities.

Issues

One of the problems with urban laws in India is that they do not recognise a citizen's right to determine how his built

environment should be governed. Our town planning laws provide for a top-down ap-

proach to planning cities. The stakeholders who actually live there are not asked for their

opinions, nor does anybody inquire about their aspirations, or what they imagine their immediate neighbourhoods should look like in the future.

These are not utopian ideas; rather they are common laws in many places in the rest of the world.

Solution

Ideally, what is required is a seamless set of laws governing our built environment: concerning a plethora of issues right from how land should be allowed to be converted from agricultural to other uses; regional planning laws; town planning laws; municipality laws; and laws needed for local area planning; down to laws for proper city and town management.

New concepts

City management is a term that might sound like Greek to a management student here in India. However, it's a common enough term in the West; one that is studied in universities just as one does any other management course.

In India, we still assume that the job of looking after city infrastructure is that of the locally elected municipality, with its entourage of officials, often in the grip of corruption.

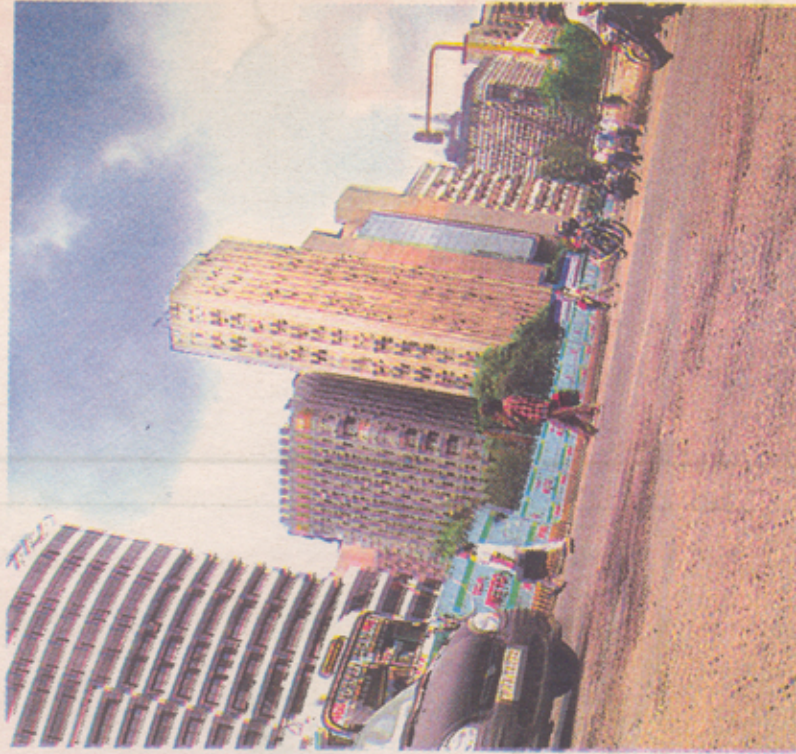
The recent breakdowns of city services in various big urban areas, such as Mumbai in July, and now in Bangalore can be taken as a sign of times to come. Such breakdowns shall become even more frequent and paralytic in the future.

Urban laws in India don't recognise a citizen's right to determine how his built environment should be governed

Only then perhaps shall we come to the realisation that we've been doing it wrong all these years.

But it may be too late by then and we might have lost both time and money. It is estimated that 22 per cent of our population lives in what can be called urban areas, as per Census definitions. Is this not a large enough figure for us to get our act together, and to re-form as well as create better laws to govern our built environment?

The author, an architect, is a member of a team drafting Delhi's building bylaws



prevail in the various urban laws even today. For example, even in New Delhi, the capital of the country, there is a multiplicity of authority in various laws, and loopholes between the Development Acts and the Municipality Acts, which are also common in many other

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