

The last few weeks have seen a spate of court orders concerning urban mis-governance; and the resultant demolitions have ultimately shaken up some governments. A reported ordinance in Maharashtra on regularising illegal construction caused eyebrows to be raised.

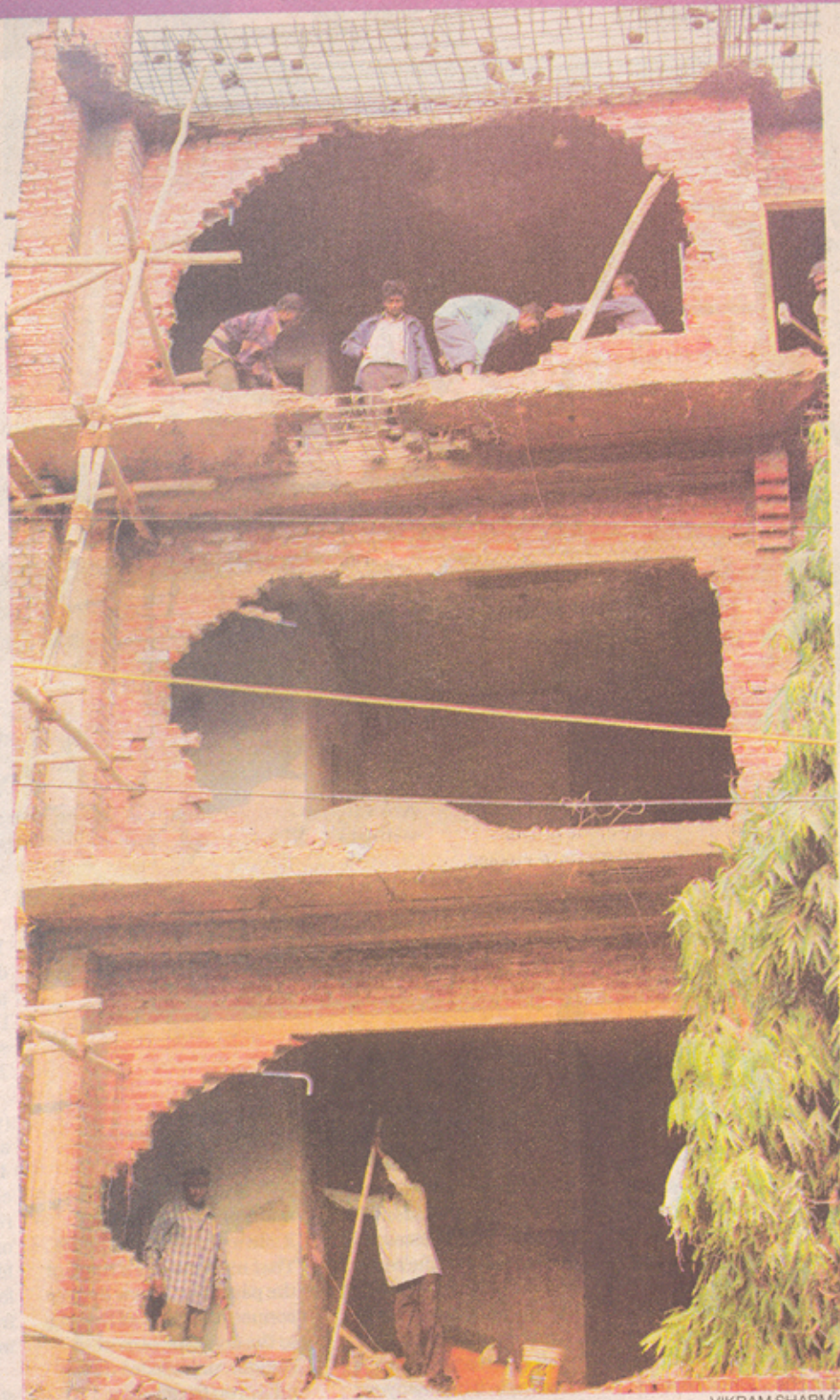
What people don't realise is that apart from the fact that an ordinance such as this one is in direct conflict with the established laws, merely regularising an illegal building on a piece of paper does not render it safer, cleaner or better in any way. Rather, it will generate more illegalities, and the buildings shall go from bad to worse.

Maybe it's time we looked at some of our well-governed cities; and also learn from the mistakes that have led to such mis-governance.

Problem solving

The answer is staring us in the face right here in the capital. Delhi has three municipal territories — one under the NDMC, one under the Delhi Cantonment Board (DCB), and that falling under the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD). The first two are well administered and relatively free of violations, while the MCD is notorious for malfunctioning.

There is one essential difference between the two urban scenarios we see in the capital: the NDMC and



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And we don't need to look far and wide. The solution to the mess is right here in our own backyard

Restructuring urban laws

the DCB are single point administrative entities without any multiplicity of authority. Both are headed by

structure is pyramidal, therefore implementation is quick and effective. The only powers which are out-

their distribution in their respective territories. Such interconnectivity allows them to control these utilities and

headed by an administrator; it has a pyramidal city management structure. All land transactions have to be

are not new - the Bombay Act of 1949 is based on the same principles. The reason is that the island of Mumbai is better administered than the suburban areas.

Ulhasnagar, a distant suburb in Mumbai, has been in the news recently owing to the issue of illegal structures. In April 2005, the Bombay High Court directed the municipal corporation to demolish a number of illegal structures. Demolitions began in November and in late December it was decided by the state government to issue an ordinance which, if promulgated, would regularise all structures constructed in Ulhasnagar by January 2005.

An area populated by refugees from Partition, Ulhasnagar has not cropped up overnight. The present conundrum is the result of a slowly decaying mess of building stock which was swept under the carpet. It's emerging as an example of rampant municipal governance.

Such issues tell us that we seem to be blind to the burgeoning urban chaos in our cities, and wake up only when the fact when an Ulhasnagar, or demolitions in our city hit us close to home.

Bottomline

This is perhaps the best occasion for the central government to take these issues and to restructure urban laws so that the country's towns and cities can be better administered. A little effort at all this and you don't have to look beyond your own backyard. The models for such reforms can be found very near and we needn't import them from abroad. However, we have the brains and the resources to create systems that are transparent and democratic as pertinent to the various situations and prob-