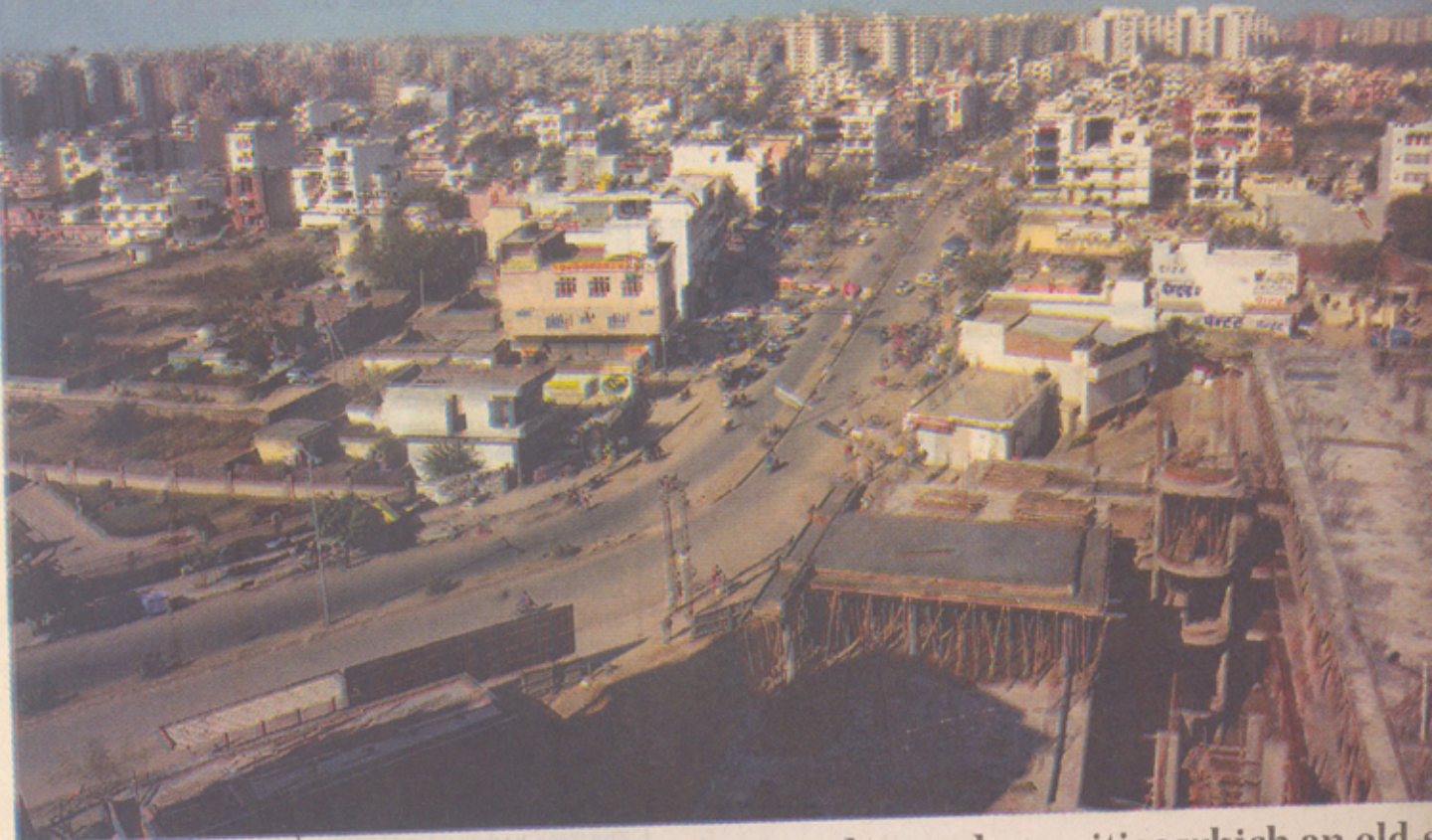


VIKRAM SHARMA



A rapidly growing market economy makes demands on cities which an old-fashioned planning approach can't deal with. New problems demand new solutions

A way out of the mess

A significant paradigm shift is required in the approach to urban planning and governance in India, an aspect which has begun to show signs of a long neglect. The need of the hour thus is to get new solutions — out of the box ideas — for the problems at hand.

To begin with, it must be emphasised that the visible problems of both urban planning and urban governance are not new to both the world or to India. But even then there are cases where the problem has been met with a solution that is unique to it. New thinking processes in urban planning were initiated about 10 years ago in Gujarat. These are bearing fruit now. Land is more equitably distributed there than in most parts of the country, and compliance of municipal and planning laws is better than in other states.

Roots of the problem

So, what are the roots of present problems? Firstly, the process of urban planning followed in the past has not been successful. The pressures created by a growing economy have

ity of money. A larger segment of people can aspire to own and to create more wealth today. This, in turn, has put a lot of pressure on towns and cities. While there are land re-

Urban governance is a specialised field which needs experts for integrated city management

sources to cater to everyone, land management laws are outdated and archaic. There is still a feeling that land is a finite resource and thus needs to be hoarded by a few, which makes it scarcer for others.

Wishing away what has been constructed and built by people over the last few decades cannot be a solution. There is a need to get creative, to come up with urban planning solutions which accept the realities of the present, and find ways to improve the urban living

— if they have a reasonable degree of public acceptance. Furthermore, the rationale behind making such urban laws needs to be transparent, and explained with examples created to prove their usefulness. Urban laws need to change to involve the people, as well as meet the need of the times. Carrying people along is the mantra. **Move to detailed micro-level planning.** The Master Plan approach is outdated. A local area planning (the LAP system) at the grass roots level is key to the future. This shall entail making accurate surveys of the existing ground situation, and then micro-level planning. In this manner planning solutions can cater to local needs and fit within the ambit of the larger plans such as that of the sub-zonal, zonal, and the Master Plan levels. There should be no confusion about land use regulations, and no scope for speculation, for which we need a crystal clear set of regulations. Furthermore, the common man should not need an expert or a lawyer to interpret laws, byelaws, and regulations. Most

Noida, among others). The needs to be institutionalised where so that compliance is ensured. **Build capacity of urban professionals.** The need of the more trained architects, planners, demographic researchers, urban governance experts, urban governance is a specialised field that needs experts. The present is crying out for change in technology and approaches brought into city management. The best practices adopted, the innovations already there, reforms in the electric power, solid waste disposal, and supply systems, the municipal reforms in integrating city management with services are all on the horizon.

These are general solutions to the problem at hand. The detailing and will change case — the problems facing

aerial view



Sudhir Mohra

dia's cities but not The issues need sea-