

In medieval times, it was traditional to construct towns and dwellings on high ground, and most of our ancient cities followed the basic principles of town planning. Even where prominent high ground was not available, as in the case of Mughal Delhi, cities were developed on areas that were not prone to flooding, and basic soil mechanics were examined before the city was built.

The same principles were followed during the setting up of New Delhi — the Raisina Hill overlooks the city, and the general slope of the land is towards the east, where the river flows. Constricting and obstructing of natural drainage is still considered sacrilege in urban planning. With modern surveying tools and software, it is possible to calculate the drainage pattern with great accuracy.

Why the floods

So why did last week's monsoon rains wreak havoc in Bhubaneswar and in Surat? What about the inundation of Mumbai last year? Many small mofussil towns too got inundated, but were not covered by the media.

As India urbanises rapidly during the next five years — and there are indications that such urbanisation is inevitable — this issue will plague us unless some serious thinking is done on how our

terrain is to be developed. It must be remembered that most of the destruction has taken place in area that have been recently developed. Ahmedabad's new city areas saw maximum damage in the wake of the Bhuj earthquake, while the older parts of the

city remained intact. And now we have floods playing havoc.

Pre-emptive steps

All this points to a crying need for us to mandate regulatory measures that should

be complied with before developing any place. Looking



aerial
VIEW

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for relief measures after the damage is done is not good enough. Topographical studies and maps must be made available to the common man before he invests his hard earned money into his dream house — he needs to take an informed decision



Unplanned urbanisation and lack of regulatory measures are to be blamed for the recent floods in the cities

about whether to invest in the locality or not.

Similar measures need to be enacted in insurance laws that should insist on an insurance rating as well as compulsory insurance before the place is occupied. On a larger scale, regional plans must be drafted so that land slopes and water retention or run off is documented before development is allowed in a particular region or stretch of land.

At present, none of these systems exist. The developer buys whatever land he

Regional plans must document land slopes and water retention of areas

can get his hands on, develops and sells it off, and moves away — leaving behind a trail of misery for his customers.

One line of thought is that market forces will take care of all these issues.

Not true. By the time the market forces catch up, the end-user is already ruined and we have huge national resources literally washed away. All these point to the larger malaise of bad laws, poor development procedures and ineffective municipal bodies.

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