

GOING TO TOWN

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The road ahead



The roadmap for urban governance must have its reasonably placed milestones, starting from a slow start, and accelerating slowly to achieve the objective: Draft and create better governance systems in which the inspector and the JE/Beldar Raj are a thing of the past.

The resident — perhaps through the RWA — needs to be part of the solution, not part of the problem. Creating such governance systems at a municipal level is not as daunting a process as it seems to be. Models exist all over the democratic world (though we cannot just photocopy them), and are based not on the colonial top-downwards approach, but on a mixture of bottom-upwards, top-downwards and using methods of empowering professionals trained in the urban sector.

Such work needs urban law specialists, as well as urban economists, people unheard of in India. To create such reforms, it is essential to understand how the market forces of the urban economy work, and to skilfully use market forces for better implementation.

The second roadmap which the Central government needs to look at is that of urban planning. In the context of the Capital, we have a situation wherein the MCD is administered through the Home Ministry at the Centre; the DDA is answerable to the ministry of urban development, the state government (formed 30 years after the MCD and DDA Acts were created) seems to be powerless, yet harassed by the common man, as he perceives it to be answerable for his daily woes. All in all, we must accept that there is a mess.

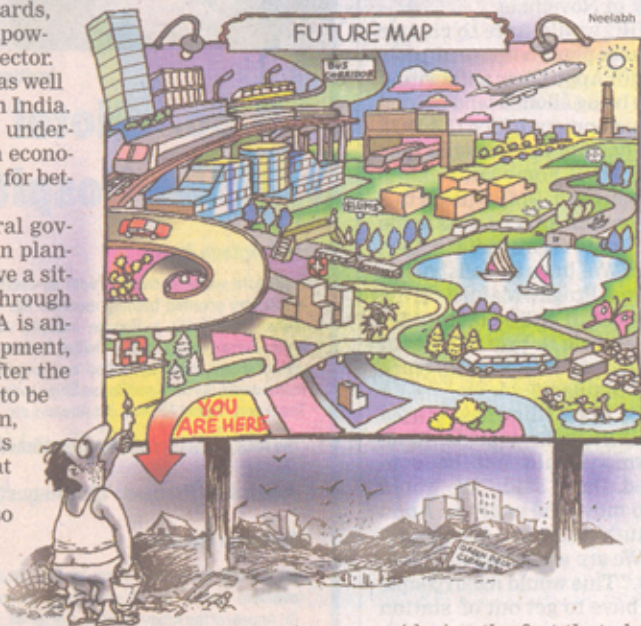
Yes, there is a need to re-densify and also to redevelop parts of the city. The economy is moving towards larger markets; more things need to be sold; there is more money to buy them, and the old allocated *halwai* and *atta chakki* shops have given way to better retail models. There is also a need for other services, so where will we go? Demand has some relevance. But merely announcing that certain roads will be allowed mixed-land use, and that A and B colonies deserve a better uncluttered way of living, is not enough.

Urban planners the world over have emerged with planning tools (duly reinforced with enabling legislative changes), which allow for constant redevelopment to be done keeping in mind the macro needs of the city, and the micro needs of the local resident. Local Area Planning (LAP) is one of many such tools. It mandates a process by which local residents are consulted (truly consulted and not just shown to have been on the files), their observations recorded on video, and then a process by which professional urban planners design redevelopment schemes which are environmentally, engineering services-wise, parking-wise et al created, and then slowly implemented. The process is very transparent and democratic, yet the urban planners are responsible for ensuring that the city's needs are addressed, while the local area's problems are also solved.

The LAP process does not mean that the local residents become the cities planners, only that they are

the micro client base, and that the city at large is also the client. It is dangerous to allow the locals (read RWAs in this case) to start doing their own planning. If such a mistake were to be made, urban discipline would break down completely. Therefore, while reforming the laws to consult RWAs, professional domain knowledge on how to rewrite the laws is critical.

News reports this week say that the UD ministry is considering a Bill to take a relook at the DDA, its mandate, and its Act. So far, so good. But where are the professional skills to rewrite the reforming acts? While the intent of the government is honourable, can it deliver a planning Act which shall be as good as we deserve? This question gathers more impor-



tance considering the fact that almost all Development Acts (DAs) in India are bad photocopies of the DDA Act. Our land management laws in the country are still a mixture of the colonial Land Acquisition Act, and a motley set of planning norms, which have failed to deliver good cities to our citizens.

Both the JNURM pressure and other indicators recognise the fact that the time has come to rewrite urban laws. But knee-jerk reforms, and following the bump-and-trip muddy boots approach to urban law drafting shall be catastrophic. The Central government needs to take a hard relook at how it must achieve these new legislations. The reasons to involve the Home Ministry are sensible all over the world, capital cities have concerns of national security as well as pressure of local governance, so the laws are written up to provide for such powers as may be needed by the Central government. The reasons are the same everywhere; the solutions tailor-made to suit every place.

Urban planners are watching this critical juncture of Delhi's future with a mixture of hope and dread. To repeat Joseph Stein's sayings, "The possibilities are tremendous, but the probabilities terrifying."