

**GOING TO TOWN**

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# In this plot, small is big!



**T**he ministry of urban development and Delhi Development Authority have delivered another blow to the capital city — the MCD has announced that it shall start implementing the September 22 notification of the MoUD which allows illegal floors built before July to be regularised, the height of all residential buildings to go up to 15 metres and more built-up area across the city.

The announcement comes after months of reported interaction between the corporation and the sarkar-e-Hind's mandarins and yet contains shoddy errors of omission and commission.

Firstly, the notification reduces the number of dwelling units which can be built on a plot — this is more true for the larger plots while the 1998 norms have been retained for the smaller plots. This is illogical in an exploding city where changing social family structures are now demanding smaller family units, with more families wanting to live close to each other and yet separately.

The notification allows approximately 20 per cent more built-up area all over the city and yet reduces the number of dwelling units which may come up. A perfect recipe for more corruption, more violation of building regulations and more chaos. In effect, such measures will end up dividing families and not plots of land.

In most parts of Delhi, the first generation of residences — built 40 odd years ago — are giving way to the need to bring old buildings down and redevelop them to accommodate growing families. The automobile boom has not helped in controlling traffic and the lack of an efficient MRTS system has only made things worse. In such a scenario, and with smaller families now being the norm, there is a need for allowing studio apartments, smaller dwelling

units and more dwelling units and also for augmenting civic services to accept the reality of redensification.

These urban tools do not need rocket science — all major cities of the world have experienced these growth pangs and have evolved simple ways to address them. Merely by drawing cars on a sanction plan you cannot ensure that they shall be parked inside the plot. On large

plots — such is the power of bad property laws.

The third shocking aspect of the September notification is that it was crafted without the involvement of the MCD, the urban local body that is charged with the dirty task of implementing it. Leave alone involving stakeholders at the ward level (that is a far cry), the MoUD, in its infinite wisdom, did not

consider it fit to consult even the civic body. The fact that the MCD spent almost three months in getting clarifications from the ministry before implementing it is a sign of the way the central government still treats the state government. If this is the state of affairs when both are led by the same political party, one shudders to think about what would happen if they were not on the same political side.

At a time when words like 'stakeholders', 'RWAs', 'traders associations' etc have become household terms, how long will this shoddy top downwards approach to urban reform hold? Haven't enough lessons been learnt from the Delhi (Special Provisions) Act of 2006, which despite having been cleared by Parliament in two days had no effect on the sealing of misused properties and illegal buildings?

Instead of notifying impossible-to-implement development control norms, it would have been sensible to have different norms for redeveloped plots (where the old buildings are demolished and new ones constructed) — so that the ground coverage is reduced, they are allowed more height, smaller dwelling units are permitted and cars are parked under the stilt floor — and to have different norms for buildings which already exist.

The norms should encourage redevelopment while making laws easier to follow and not make them so generic and open to interpretation that they encourage more municipal corruption. This is a recipe for chaos.



er plots, they may need to be parked in basements.

Merely putting money into an ES-CROW account does not mean it shall be used for the purpose it is being collected for — institutionalised systems involving the local people need to be put into place so that engineering infrastructure comes in first and redevelopment follows later.

Secondly, this notification shall spark off a plethora of court cases. On many plots, each floor is owned by different owners (though without any formal legal title) and the issue of who has the 'roof rights' (another creation of bad urban titling laws) shall draw battle lines between hitherto peaceful neigh-

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