

Industry and Trade bodies join RWAs in protesting Multi Year Tariffs: objections to DERC's proposals pour in.

- NGO asks for more time, cites delay by DISCOMS to file ARRAs as precedent.

New Delhi, 20th Dec. 2007: Members of various industry and trade associations have joined the chorus of objections to the Multi Year Tariff [MYT] proposal of DERC to hike tariffs for the combined four year term.

“We have been informed by various trade and industry bodies that they support our demand to scrap the MYT proposals and instead demand a reduction of at least 25% in power tariffs based on the profits collected by DISCOMS over the last five years,” said Sanjay Kaul, President of People’s Action.

Calling the proposal a ‘death knell’ for industry due to the high cost of power in Delhi, members of industry have expressed dismay at the regulator’s disdain for consumers, particularly bulk and commercial users.

S.K. Maheshwari, Gen. Secretary of the Patparganj F.I.E. Entrepreneurs Association, said “In the last tariff hike which was withdrawn, Industry was left out of any relief and this new proposal is contrary to expectations in the sense that we were now waiting for a reduction in tariff based on the handsome profits collected by private DISCOMS in the last five years thanks to highly beneficial terms of the contract.

Maheshwari confirmed that “Many of our members have submitted objections as scheduled and we hope that the DERC will finally act in favour of consumers this time,”.

At the other end, Secretary General of Confederation of All India Traders [CAIT], Praveen Khandelwal has also expressed support to the RWAs demand for a reduction of tariff based on the last five years performance and the exorbitant commercial rates being collected by the DISCOMS for the last five years.

“We have already expressed our support to the demand for reduction of tariffs and we comprehensively reject the MYT proposal as well as the ToD concept,” said Khandelwal.

RWAs and NGOs involved in the sector have in the meantime argued for an extension of the last date for filing objections based on the complex nature of the calculations required to analyse the Annual Revenue Requirement [ARR] filed by DISCOMS.

“How can a layman file objections on such a complex subject within three weeks when it takes the DISCOMS so much time to file them. Besides, we believe, the DISCOMS have delayed filing ARRAs by almost three months themselves,” said Laliet Kumar, Advocate and member of Jan Sehyog.

Residents have expressed skepticism over the speed with which the DERC is trying to finish off the public consultation process. “ If the tariffs had to be decided in January, why were the ARRAs not filed

in October and notices issued by DERC then,” asked B.S. Sachdeva, former Executive Director, Power Finance Corporation.

RWAs seek extension for filing objections to DERC Notice: complex calculations require expert involvement, say RWAs.

New Delhi, 18th Dec., 2007: Resident Welfare Associations of Delhi under the aegis of United RWAs Joint Action [URJA] Delhi's largest federation of RWAs, have today written to the DERC with a copy to the Power Minister Dr. A.K. Walia seeking more time for consumers to file objections to the ARRs filed by DISCOMS as well as the notice issued by the DERC on the Multi Year tariff [MYT] and the Time of Day [ToD] proposals.

Commenting on the request, which comes after the DERC had extended the last date by five days already, Sanjay Kaul, President of People's Action said, "We have received a number of representations from RWAs and independent groups that have claimed that the petitions filed by DISCOMS are impossible to understand for lay persons and as such it requires the assistance of experts and which in turn is taking time. Based on that we have recommended a further extension of the deadline to the second week of January 2008".

Atul Goyal, who sent in the request on behalf of URJA said, "It takes time to seek the help of experts because RWAs are in no position to hire them and have to depend on the time that such experts can give them in the midst of their busy schedules. Besides, what has taken DISCOMS three months to file with the resources at their command cannot be unraveled by ordinary residents in three weeks".

"It should normally have been the prerogative of the DERC to analyse the petitions of the DISCOMS and give us a truthful assessment of their figures, but it is a telling statement of the perceived bias we have of the regulator that ordinary residents have to seek the help of chartered accountants, power experts and other technocrats to understand the complex jargon of the petitions", said Laliet Kumar of Jan Sehyog Manch, an NGO which has also written separately to the DERC on this account.

"Members have found serious discrepancies in the petitions filed by DISCOMS and it has become necessary to look at the proposals even more carefully," said B.S. Sachdeva, former Executive Director, Power Finance Corporation.

South Delhi RWAs seek answers on HSBC blunders: 21 questions posed to TRIPP before public meeting.

New Delhi, 13th December, 2007: Members of South Delhi RWAs along with a core group of members of URJA, Delhi's apex body of RWAs, have compiled a set of 21 questions that challenge the unsustainable basis of the HCBS plan at a fundamental level.

Sanjay Kaul, President of People's Action had received a request from the Manager, TRIPP, the IIT group that is supposed to have crafted this proposal, to meet and discuss the project.

However we asked them for extensive information on the project before meeting and in fact have sent them a list of 21 queries on the project, which in our collective opinion are not clear.

"These questions were compiled after an exhaustive exchange with various members of URJA and compiled and sent to Mr. Mahesh Gaur, Manager TRIPP about two weeks back for seeking answers before we take a public stand," said Sanjay Kaul, President of People's Action. "However, we have no response from them as yet," added Kaul.

"RWA leaders have consensually agreed that the HCBS project is a disastrous scheme and needs to be scrapped before it is too late and more money is flushed down the drain", said Atul Goyal of URJA Central Committee. "We are planning to hold a public meeting on this issue but have given the project developers time to respond to our queries", added Goyal.

The questions that have been addressed to TRIPP are as follows:

1. Please confirm that a cycle/manually driven vehicle track will be created all along the length of the corridor under construction now.
2. Has there been any audit on the number of trees uprooted during this construction phase along the corridor.
3. Has any agency conducted a study on the impact of the concretization of walkways resulting in no room left for loose earth for trees still existing along the route.
4. Which International agencies were consulted on this project, their contacts, email and name of group heads etc in full detail.
5. Were these agencies paid, or did they offer their expertise gratis, and if paid, how much?
6. Were any of the technical plans, the implementation details developed by any international agency, contractor or not? If yes, who, and their contacts.
7. Please list the countries and cities where similar systems have been running successfully for at least five years as of today: name the projects, the companies or boards running the systems and the details of developing and contracting agencies of such successful models.
8. Have any specifics been firmed up on the quality of buses that would run along this corridor, the fare structure, the numbers of buses required to be procured for efficient functioning of such a system, a matrix of driver caliber and other indices required to facilitate such a project.
9. Has the project concurrently planned restrictions on car and independent vehicle usage to balance the development of the HCBS or not and what has the Government to say on this.

10. What was the effective brief/ objective provided to TRIPP/yourselves/agency developing the plan by the Government. Please forward a copy of the original tender/contract terms or restate the objective in exact fashion in reply.
11. In view of the common failure of traffic lights and frequent breakdown of traffic maintenance at crossroads, what safeguards have been developed under this project to ensure that a traffic pile up of buses does not occur leading to choking of the corridor, the crossings and subsequently the entire road stretch.
12. How many breakdown galleys/pits have been provided along the length of this corridor, at what distance from each other in the event of a bus breakdown, and what apparatus will be put on stand by to remove such a bus that is stuck on the corridor, and what response time shall be allowed as within tolerance for such accidents.
13. In the event of an emergency situation, such as an untoward accident, a bus fire, a pile up or other similar situations, what are the project plans for an ambulance to reach or service the situation.
14. Moving over 85% of the vehicular traffic within 50% of the current road length will expectedly narrow down overtaking options for fast moving vehicles and also limit speed [your claims and calculations for improvement in traffic throughput after the project is activated is found wanting on many counts, so pl. ignore that aspect in answering this question] How does the project factor in the need for emergency services like Police vehicles, VIP movement and Ambulance movement should it be necessitated along the corridor or around it.
15. Allocating cycle tracks that constitute one fourth of road space for 3.5% of road usage being difficult to understand, please furnish precise data of cyclist concentration at various points during the day along the corridor route with any evidence of average distance covered by cyclists from start to finish on a daily run basis.
16. Similarly, please furnish data for hand drawn, other non-mechanical vehicles in the manner above.
17. In one of the objects mentioned somewhere in your many presentations, it was represented that the HCBS would not be duplicating metro routing but supplement it. Knowing that the GK-I to Lodhi corridor is along the metro line, please specify in which portions of the Ambedkar Ngr. – ISBT corridor is the HCBS not duplicating the Metro route and exactly where it supplements it ?
18. Along the corridor, opposite GK-I is a school called the Indian School, where parents of wards and school buses pick up children off the road causing a huge jam. Will the schools be shifted, or another area provided to it for alighting and boarding school buses and private vehicles of parents, wards etc after the HCBS is operational?
19. In various presentations on the HCBS system worldwide the emphasis is on it being a total system. Clearly this was not implemented in the case of Delhi which is doing this in relay fashion and one length will have to wait for all others before the 'system' emerges. Why?
20. It is repeatedly also stressed that being a system, the HCBS will require an autonomous body to run it, unless of course you propose the DTC to run it. What body is this, has it been constituted or not – basically who will run the HCBS, if and when it is ready.
21. In many comments by TRIPP members, the HCBS is posited as the better alternative to expensive metros suggesting it costs less time, is flexible and is ready in much shorter durations. Is the HCBS corridor on schedule, and if no when will it be ready for use?

Press Release

Delhi airport mess due to DIAL's taxi policy: passenger comfort and choice is compromised for profit.

New Delhi, 12th Dec, 2007: Passengers trying to take a cab from the International or Domestic airports suffer at the hands of the pre-paid system only because of private party DIAL, who has secured the contract for the refurbishment of the Airports, and its policy of profit before customer comfort.

“Instead of allowing a choice of cab companies to operate from the Airport, the DIAL management has entered into lucrative monopolistic agreements which bar all except one taxi company to operate from the Airport,” said Varinder K. Arora of People's Action, a consumer rights group working on governance issues in the capital.

“When this was brought to the notice of the Radio Taxi Operators Association [RTOA], we were shocked to know that they too were protesting this situation and that DIAL had introduced a bidding process which had left out almost all of their members from operating at the airports.”

The RTOA has also objected to the arrangement on account of a compromise of license conditions. The Radio Taxi operates on the condition of a metered charge whereas DIAL has entered into an arrangement that allows one radio taxi operator to overcharge up to 100 % for pre-fixed charges from the airport.

People's Action Gen. Secretary, Col. [Retd.] D.K. Shandilya had earlier written to the Transport Minister to look into the complaints of passengers regarding the shortage of options at the airport and the reported violation of the license conditions by M/s Easy Cabs.

“Radio Taxis were introduced on the condition that they would bring a transparent, fair system of commuting to Delhi and offer more choice and better quality to commuters. This current practice by DIAL in conjunction with Easy Cabs is contradicting both parameters – first, they are charging over and above the standard fixed rate of Rs. 15/km and secondly, they are operating a cartel, minimizing choice for people arriving at Airports in the city and increasing their harassment by having to queue up after long hours of flying,” said Arora.

“The fundamental reason passengers suffer at the airport is not the pre-paid system but the abnormal weight on its operation due to a lack of choice at the airports,” said a travel trade expert. “It is only because of the DIAL management's practices and it is creating a huge embarrassment for us on the tourism front”, he said.

Protestors demonstrate at DERC Office: RWAs, Trade and Industry representatives call the exercise an ‘agenda’ of the DISCOMS. Seek winding up of DERC.

New Delhi, 11th Dec. 2007: The last day of the Public Hearing being conducted by Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission [DERC] was disrupted today when a bus load of residents converged to demonstrate outside the DERC office today against the manner in which the DERC has “subverted consumer interest over the last five years”.

The demonstration led by People’s Action and URJA levelled a series of charges against the manner in which the DERC was consistently ignoring consumers complaints and playing along the wishes of the DISCOMS. Close to 100 residents joined the protest.

“This public hearing is a sham, conducted on behalf of, for the benefit of and the profit of private Distribution Companies [DISCOMS],” said S.K. Maheshwari, Gen. Secretary of Patparganj F.I.E Entrepreneurs Association who joined the agitation with a number of industry representatives.

The charges against DERC ranged from turning a blind eye to cases of open harassment and overcharging by DISCOMS, particularly BSES, being negligent on financial probity and not ensuring fiscal prudence on behalf of DISCOMS.

Members demanded the resignation of the Chairman and Members of the DERC or the winding up of the Commission for its complete inability to protect consumer rights for the last five years.

Sanjay Kaul, President of People’s Action said, “This regime has created a culture of terror with no recourse to justice – they have taken away our right to petition the courts in the ordinary course by creating special courts, they have barred the Consumer Court to intervene in our favour, they have secured the services of the Central Industrial Security Force [CISF] to bully and threaten consumers and they have installed meters without due process or approvals – and yet this Commission is silent. This is the worst example of monopolistic, cartelised power distribution operations ever in a free country.”

Other members were equally vocal. “We want to know under what conditions were the contracts extended for these companies, what the yardstick of performance was, what the new clauses are, what the new terms of agreement are – without that there can be no extension of contracts, said Rakesh Bhardwaj, President of Sheikh Sarai RWA and who had earlier protested the unavailability of the ARRAs filed by DISCOMS in Hindi.

Holding placards that said, ‘No MYT, No ToD’ protestors frequently raised slogans against DERC calling it “an agency of the DISCOMS” with particular emphasis on their allowing corrupt practices of BSES. Members dispersed only after most of the protestors were allowed in to the DERC Public Hearing premises where they petitioned for scrapping the Multi Year Tariff [MYT] and Time of Day [ToD] proposal.

Press Release

Resident groups support State Commission's view: the HC is compromising consumer rights by disallowing commission orders in many cases.

New Delhi, 11th December 2007: RWAs have come out in strong support of the reported stance of the State Consumer Commission where it has expressed angst at the manner in which its orders are being spiked by the HC for various reasons. Residents have expressed alarm at the frequency of these cases and worried that an institution such as the state commission is being constantly subjected to humiliation by the High Court.

“We have seen a pattern emerge and it does not bode well for the consumer rights movement in our city,” said Sanjay Kaul, President, People’s Action. “In the Justice Nandrajog judgement on the fast meters petition filed by Suresh Jindal, we found that the consumer aspect of the case was so severely crippled that consumers have not been able to recover from the onslaught that private DISCOMS have launched since then”, he said.

“By overriding the State Commission in that case, Justice Nandrajog not only impacted our fundamental right to protest and petition, he also took away our potency to fight any further. Just for that, the Nandrajog judgement will forever be remembered as a body blow to the rights of consumers in Delhi,” added Kaul.

Activists and consumer rights groups have also expressed concern at the constant abuse of powers by the HC in cases relating to compensation and penalties awarded by the state commission. “An attempt is being made by powerful corporates to tie down consumers from all sides so that they have no recourse to justice,” said activist **Ravinder Singh** who has been fighting on various fronts with corporates that indulge in corrupt practices.

While residents agreed that there has been criticism of Justice J.D. Kapoor on account of his style and some have even called it ‘vigilante’ but residents say that in each case even if he has erred it has been on the side of the consumer. “His pronouncements and penalties have to be seen in the light of establishing a precedent to deter such anti-consumer behaviour by corporates”, said Advocate **Laliet Kumar**, a member of People’s Action Legal cell.

Repeated attacks on the integrity and the independence of the consumer commission will not only serve to make it ineffectual, the Courts will have only themselves to blame for an increase in their workload “ For a judicial system that is crumbling under the weight of cases, to arrogate to itself cases which clearly exist within range and domain of the state commission is not only self-defeating but a case of overstepping its brief,” said Kaul.

Press Release

Gurgaon RWAs welcome DHBVN statements: Sushant Lok residents feel vindicated.

- People's Action demands penalties on developers who have used public spaces for installing transformers and water tanks.
- RWAs must be vigilant, says JAFRA Chairman

Gurgaon, 17th Nov. 2007: The statements by senior officials of DHBVN accusing private colonizers of using spaces meant for power utilities and sub-stations and selling them as plots or flats have found total support among active RWAs of Gurgaon.

“The recent statements of the DHBVN MD, and other senior officials are cent per cent true and accurate,” said Ajay Jain of Sushant Lok_I, Gurgaon who has been arguing the same issue with private developer Ansals in regard to a transformer the colonizer was trying to put up inside a public park. “There are two plots earmarked according to the current plan of Sushant Lok-I C Block but both are unutilized while the colonizer is merrily occupying green areas of the colony”, he said.

Col. Ratan Singh, Chairman of JAFRA, the apex RWA body of Gurgaon said, “ We have already informed local administration and DHBVN officials about large scale encroachments by such colonizers in common areas and have demanded that these be removed. The right of residents over parks is non-negotiable and developers must invest in designated spaces for setting up utilities, be it water tanks, security offices or transformers”. He added that RWAs of all areas in these colonies must stay vigilant and bring such instances to the notice of DHBVN.

Residents of Sushant Lok C-Block, an Ansals developed colony were up in arms when the colonizer tried to first occupy a park and then another, in a bid to save money and set up a transformer within the park. “It is our right to expect good quality of electricity supply after having paid to stay in a planned colony but it cannot compromise my right to have green areas and parks”, said Deepak Varma, another resident of Sushant Lok who fought to have the transformer removed from the *Tikona* Park in C-Block Sushant Lok-I.

Shashi Sharma, Convenor, People's Action Gurgaon, has already brought the fraud to the notice of the Haryana Electricity Regulatory Authority.

“We have informed the HERC that private parties, including builders and developers, have found a new way of saving money and trouble by taking over portions of public parks for such utilities. This is illegal and against the communities interests”, said Sharma, adding that the group is advocating a penalty to be levied on all developers who have consumed public land for installation of utilities.

Press Release

RWAs slam HCBS project: Seek public consultation and presentation from LG's office on the project.

New Delhi, 14th Nov. 2007: The HCBS project, which has created chaos in large tracts of Delhi and now claimed a young man's life, has come in for much deserved flak from residents all along the route.

"This route never had a traffic jam ever but now there is one every hour of the working day," said an exasperated Indira Dinesh of Defence Colony.

RWA President of Lajpat Nagar Harvinder Singh expressed similar views "This Bagota model is destined to fail in Delhi simply because of the difference in population and road availability. Whoever thought of this crazy plan should be penalized for experimenting on public money and land "

Sanjay Kaul, President of People's Action said that this was by far one of the most hare-brained, self-indulgent projects he had seen in a long time. "This is the equivalent of what happens when you give spoilt brats expensive toys to play with", suggesting that the **HCBS** should be re-christened '**How Chaos Becomes Systemic**'.

Residents are mostly mystified on the purpose and meaning of the corridor. "Nowhere in the world will you find such a illogical transport plan. Strangely, authorities are claiming that this will ease traffic. How?", asked a bewildered resident of Sheikh Sarai which has suffered choked roads for over a year now. B.L. Handoo, President of the RWA in Saket has only one question to ask: "How was this plan passed without public consultation or without public sanction."

In the meantime, Vinay Walia of Lado Sarai RWA is planning to file an RTI seeking details of who initiated and approved the plan to set up a legal objection in due course. "This madness is rooted in corruption," he said confirming that he believed this project was designed to divert JNNURM funds for the benefit of local politicians. "I also want to find out how much the Consultant was paid for this project".

While everyone is gunning for the originator of the plan, many see that as an attempt to shield the real persons who allowed this crazy proposal to pass muster.

Sanjay Kaul said that it must be established who gave this project the green signal. "The originator of this madness could be crazy by disposition, but what happened to the guy who evaluated and found it fit for implementation - that is what we want to know."

Atul Goyal, Coordinator United RWAs Joint Action [URJA] said "We have today made a request for a presentation from the LG's office to understand what, apart from allowing a crazy professor to go beserk, is the meaning of this project."

Blueline Victims go to Court: Petition pleads for dismissal of Transport Minister, equitable treatment of victims in granting compensation and relief.

New Delhi, 12th November 2007: In continuation of the efforts to establish responsibility for repeated deaths on Delhi roads by Blueline Buses and to seek compensation for such victims, a petition was filed today for impeachment on the suo moto case in the High court of Delhi on behalf of People's Action, acting for the Blueline Victims Association, by Advocate Jasbir Singh Malik.

“The petition is an attempt to fix responsibility for the criminal negligence that we have seen with regard to the rampant deaths literally everyday by Government licensed buses on Delhi roads. It is also an attempt to help the hundreds of victims that have lost their family members throwing their lives into utter disarray and sometimes despair,” said Sanjay Kaul, President, People's Action.

The petition seeks the dismissal of the Transport Minister for dereliction of duty and criminal negligence and seeks a level compensatory format for all Blueline victims.

The decision to form a Blueline Victims Association was taken on October 8th, when RWAs under the banner of URJA [United RWAs Joint Action], along with People's Action members and some victim's families *gheraoed* the CM's residence. The Association was formally announced on 18th October, with members of victims' families as office bearers.

Rajesh Verma, the sole member of the Association who survived a Blueline accident and President-elect of the Association said, “We have been running from pillar to post seeking justice but we have found no help from the Government. Many of our members have not been able to even get their cases moved to court due to slack investigations and many others who were promised jobs and compensatory relief have got nothing.”

The petition filed today also seeks to question the arbitrary award of compensation by the Delhi government to victims of the Badarpur incident while not acknowledging others who lost family members to Bluelines. “This is a highly unfair situation and makes it look like we should all have to die together to count as worthy of compensation,” said a peeved S.N. Mishra, Vice President-elect of the Association.

Sandeep Kalyan, Gen. Secretary-elect of the association, who lost his brother to a Blueline but has been unable to record his demise due to accident for lack of evidence said that for people like him and countless others, the only way out left was this petition. “I have no hope of justice from this Government, except the petition filed today”, he said.

Apollo Hospital death of Blueline victim exposes liability of Delhi Government: People's Action lists demands:

- Create a corpus for Blueline accident victims
- Order all Hospitals to admit victims without formalities, and
- Settle expenses directly with Delhi government

New Delhi, 1st Nov. 2007: Holding the Delhi Government responsible for yet another death by a state-licensed Blueline bus, People's Action has today also sought to expose the government's apathy in not providing for hospital and trauma care for such victims.

The lone survivor of the accident by Blueline bus has succumbed to injuries but according to his family members, the victim was not attended to in time by Hospital staff merely due to the family's inability to furnish cash advances to the hospital in time.

People's Action has argued that it is the duty of the Delhi Government to step up relief and repair in situations that have been caused by arms of its administration viz. state-licensed buses under the Transport Department. "This Government is not only aiding and abetting Blueline deaths, it is also avoiding to offer relief once the deed is done," said Kaul. "We have lost yet another citizen to the apathy of the Delhi government yesterday in providing medical assistance to such a victim", he said.

Residents have argued that private hospitals that have received land at preferential rates from the Government cannot refuse treatment to citizens even if they are in no position to pay. "It is the duty of the Delhi Government to enforce the rule that such victims as may be brought to any hospitals in Delhi will settle the medical bills directly with the government," said Varinder Arora of URJA East Delhi

"Numerous other cases have come to our notice ever since we have formed the Blueline Victims Association. Victims' families are unable to meet mortuary and medical expenses and in many cases absence of timely and proper medical assistance is exacerbating the pain of the victims," added Kaul.

People's Action has today demanded that a special corpus fund be created for victims of Blueline accidents and that the government direct all hospitals and medical centers to treat such victims without waiting for formalities and settle the medical expenses directly with the Government, which may release funds from the corpus as and when required in such contingency situations.

"The Government is paralysed by the hush money of the bus cartel," said Major [retd.] Rohit Sethi of URJA West Delhi, "otherwise this death of a teenager, like many others could have been avoided."

Victims of Blueline buses and residents protest at Raj Niwas: demand action from LG against Government.

- LG's Warden scheme is too little, too late, say members.
- Transport Minister continues to smile
- CM continues to pass the buck.

New Delhi, 27th Oct. 2007: Over 40 victims of Blueline Buses along with members of Delhi's largest RWA combine URJA today protested at the LG House to seek the intervention of the LG on what they termed a systemic failure of the Delhi Government to rein in Blueline Buses and improve the transport mess in the city.

We had petitioned the LG in August seeking his intervention in the situation because we could see that the Chief Minister was neither interested nor capable of solving the problem. The LG's office offered us a terse line asking us to refer the matter back to the Delhi Government. Today, two months later and 20 deaths later, we want to know what action he intends to take now," said Major [Retd.] Rohit Sethi, of URJA West Delhi.

Holding placards saying "Self-regulation kills" and "CM's inaction kills", victims held a silent protest seeking the direct intervention of the LG on the issue. "The LG enjoys the supreme position in Government in the state of Delhi. This position carries with it a responsibility to intervene when the Government fails. We are demanding stringent action from him to save our lives, aid "Atul Goyal of URJA Central Delhi.

Rajesh Verma, Convenor of the Blueline Victims Association said that victims were going from pillar to post seeking help and assistance and the Government far from helping them out was playing games with Bus Operators through absurd schemes like self regulation. "This self- regulation is a farce and it will continue to kill, as it was doing earlier," he warned.

People's Action has termed the LG's earlier idea of appointing wardens as belated and ad-hoc. " The LG could have sounded an alarm that could have saved at least 20 people from death had it been taken when we represented him in August and beseeched him to take some action," said Col. [Retd.] D.K. Shandilya, Gen. Secretary People's Action.

Sanjay Kaul, President of People's Action had written an impassioned letter to the LG on 21st August this year [letter attached] after all protestations failed to move the Chief Minister to either remedy the situation or remove the Transport Minister who has exhibited serious laxity in solving the problem.

"The result of that letter was a single line reply that asked us to take up the issue with Delhi Government – the same people who have refused to act, or react on this issue for almost nine years", said Col. Shandilya

RWAs who have organised themselves to protest the free run to cartels are disappointed by the inaction of the LG. "It is no use providing symptomatic relief. Dramatic initiatives like Traffic

Wardens do not address the real problem – or the real killer – the cartel that is running Bluelines with tacit support from the CM and the Transport Minister,” said Anil Bajpayi of Gandhi Nagar RWA.

“Instead of all this dithering and confusion, a blanket decision to beef up DTC would serve the purpose very well – but the CM does not want that – guess why,” said Atul Goyal of URJA hinting that there is a direct relationship between elected representatives and the cartels that run these private buses.

**Bus Operators involvement in traffic management, unconstitutional, illegal: Govt. is rubbing salt into our wounds, say victims.
To seek LG's intervention on the issue.**

New Delhi, 25th October 2007: Even as civil society groups in the city are appalled at the newest proposal from the Delhi Government asking Blueline Bus operators to 'self-regulate' on the one hand, the cocky response of the bus operators in offering a Helpline and sending 'teams' on to 'roads' is seen by most as making a mockery of the pain of victims families.

"How can the Delhi Government pass on the authority of redressal to those who are accused of a criminal neglect," asked an incredulous Rajesh Verma, Convenor of the newly formed Blueline Victims Association. "And who has given the marauding bus mafia the right to roam the streets of Delhi ordering traffic around when they are the ones who kill and maim due to their corrupt policies", he added visibly angered.

"This latest proposal of the CM is both a composite exhibition of the confused state of her mind on the issue and a confirmation of the grip bus cartels have on this CM and her cabinet," said Sanjay Kaul, President, People's Action. "This action of the Delhi Government is outside of all norms of administrative precedent and will come for severe reprimand," Kaul added.

RWA members have also expressed shock at this response by the Delhi Government. "What the Traffic Police can't do, and the Transport Officials have not been able to do is now going to be done by a cartel – who has authorized them, and under what powers are they doing this, needs to be investigated," said Manor [Retd.] Rohit Sethi of West Delhi, URJA.

Coming under fire was the Chief Minister who has lately made highly embarrassing statements on the issue starting with saying that she would prefer to walk rather than ride a Blueline Bus, going on to chiding victims for not walking properly on the roads.

"It is a shame that while the Government is fooling around with crazy ideas like self-regulation, we are yet to see a single measure from the Transport Department for increased passenger safety", said Sandeep Kalyan, another member of the Association who lost his brother in an accident with a Blueline.

The Blueline Victim Association is now looking to petitioning the LG on the issue. "We have seen too many irrelevant proposals doing the rounds. All we want is that the five point proposal that was presented by People's Action is implemented and that victims are provided support relief and compensation that is due to them," said S.N. Mishra of Blueline Victims Association.

Taxi cartels at Delhi Airports overcharge by almost 100%: Flout Transport Dept. license conditions rates, while passengers have no choice.

New Delhi, 23rd October 2007: The bad days of taxi cartels at the Domestic and International airport are back. Passengers at airport terminals are finding out that they are being overcharged by radio taxi operators at airports, who have created a cartel and charge highly inflated fares, which contradict conditions against which they were issued licenses by the Transport Dept.

“Radio taxis were introduced to offer greater choice to commuters, but it is ironical that radio taxis that were introduced to offer more options to commuters and passengers at airports are back to the monopoly days of yesteryears,” said a frustrated passenger who had to queue up for a pre-paid voucher late night and found that he paid almost twice of what he paid when he came into the airport early morning. “Either the dirty black and yellow cabs at the police run pre-paid or the 100% extra for the radio cab,” he added.

Coming under heavy criticism is the much-hyped privatization plans of the Government and the management company contracted for the modernization of the airport. “Is this their idea of modernization – squeeze the passenger’s options and make him pay double,” said L. Balasubramaniam of the P&T Residents Welfare Association and a trade unionist.

Shockingly, just when airport modernization has been initiated and customers expected more choice and better quality, the old License Raj days are being re-introduced. “In Bangkok, one can choose any number of cab companies one wants to - starting from yellow and black metered cabs, to limousines, to Mercedes or even a self driven car. But here, the cartel has declared the airport private property and they will charge whatever they want,” said Rohit Srivastava, a resident of Vasant Kunj.

People’s Action, which has earlier worked on auto and taxi fare issues has pointed out that the pattern followed by Police pre-paid booths are now being copied by such cartels.

“When we last conducted an enquiry into the running of police booths, we found that the Pre-paid booths regularly apply a surcharge of 20-40 % on average, where customers had to pay in advance against a receipt that was calculated zonally,” said Col. [Retd.] D.K. Shandilya, Gen. Secretary of People’s Action and who was also involved in the creation of a Distance Chart to help commuters know the real distance and costs between frequently traveled points in Delhi.

“On the one hand the Delhi Police cannot secure passengers traveling on Delhi roads, and then they charge them a premium to secure them in black and yellow cabs – on the other hand radio cab companies run a racket in connivance with Airport officials to overcharge tired and hassled passengers,” said V.K. Arora of the group.

**CM's move for self regulation for Blueline cartel an invitation to disaster: Govt. has allowed the bus owner cartel an escape route, says Blueline Victims Association.
RWAs express concern.**

New Delhi, 22nd Oct. 2007: Livid at the manner in which the Delhi Government is bending over backwards to accommodate the demands of the bus owner cartels, residents from various corners of Delhi are aghast at the latest statement of the CM. “What the CM is saying is like asking criminals to frame laws for themselves,” says a shocked Blueline Victims Association member S.N. Mishra who lost his daughter to Blueline bus last year.

RWAs from various areas have also expressed grave concern at this new angle from the CM. “It looks like the CM is in a mood to allow them not just a free run, but also safe passage once they have caused mayhem,” said Major [Retd.] Rohit Sethi of West Patel Nagar RWA, who was one of the people who protested outside the CM's residence when 11 people were mowed down by a Blueline last week.

Acting President of the Blueline Victims Association, Rajesh Verma expressed surprise at the development and said, “Instead of bringing them under the supervision of DTC and employing stricter penalties against them the CM is allowing Blueline bus owners to frame regulations for themselves – but the point is, that is what they have been doing all this while and that is why people are getting killed”.

Experts in administrative management are openly denouncing this approach. “We have never seen anything as ridiculous as this. This is tantamount to giving free run to an already out of control mechanism and we can confirm that more people will die if this hair brained proposal is activated ”, said B.S. Sachdeva, a former Executive Director of a public sector undertaking.

Sanjay Kaul, President of People's Action which has been on the forefront of the campaign on the issue said, “This proposal from the CM is an example of the limited options available to the state while dealing with such operators. This shows, among other things, how deep the cartels run within this Government, and the question that everyone is asking is: Why is the CM of Delhi avoiding bringing Bluelines under the direct supervision of DTC, or introducing the kilometre scheme? ”.

Press Release

Victims of Blueline Buses form Association - to seek compensation, policy changes: Association will fight for victims collectively.

New Delhi, 18th Oct. 2007: A group of people that have lost family members to Blueline buses or have been affected by such incidents have come together to form an Association to fight for the rights of such families and victims.

“Organised into an Association, they will be able to secure compensation and other benefits that is due to them by the state,” said Sanjay Kaul, President of People’s Action who had mooted the idea of the Association last week after hearing reports of extreme difficulties faced by such families.

“In addition, we will continue to demand the ouster of the Transport Minister for his culpability in so many deaths on Delhi roads”, he added.

Many victims’ families have not even been able to register FIR’s due to Police resistance and many are having to struggle to get witnesses to stand for them. Sandeep Kalyan has been running from pillar to post, trying to get the Police to even acknowledge that his brother’s accident was caused by a Blueline bus.

In other cases, victims are promised financial support but nothing comes of it. Bharti Sharma, Mother of Morricks who lost his life four months ago in a Blueline accident, said that their case has not even reached the Courts and that their meetings with the Minister of Transport Haroon Yusuf yielded nothing as he refused to consider any case for compensation.

The declaration by the Delhi Government after last week’s horrific accident that left 8 dead and others injured has also exacerbated the situation: Victims want to know why people dying in greater numbers in a single incident is more worthy of compensation than people dying of the same Blueline bus individually. “The Government is concerned with political damage, not the victims or their families,” said Atul Goyal of United RWAs Joint Action [URJA] Delhi’s largest RWA Collective that protested outside the CM’s residence last Monday along with people’s Action activists, against such incidents.

People’s Action has received support from various lawyers who have agreed to take up such cases on a goodwill basis. “We are also thankful for the support of the Press in getting some of these families together and we will continue to seek their help in reaching out to such affected families all over Delhi. We are also thankful to a number of people who have extended help in assisting the Association and the victims in their quest for a fair hearing on issues of compensation, jobs and other benefits”, said Kaul adding that People’s Action will support the association through all means possible including seeking policy changes that could stop such deaths in future.

DISCOMS demand for tariff hike is suspicious: RWAs want a commission of enquiry and financial audit.

- DISCOMS are operating a cartel, say RWAs
- No question of tariff hike, DISCOMS are rolling in profits
- Instead, a 10% reduction is expected.

New Delhi, 4th October 2007: At a time when consumers are still waiting for the benefits of privatization of power to trickle down, they are finding it difficult to believe that profitable DISCOMS are asking for tariff increases.

“DISCOMS are in the pink of health, they are rolling in money, their stock prices are at an all time high and one of them is planning India’s biggest ever IPO – what more evidence do we need that it’s time for DISCOMS to share their profits with consumers who have been at their receiving end for five years,” asked Sanjay Kaul, President People’s Action.

RWAs who met the DERC last month on the issue and who have petitioned the new Power Minister recently for tariff reduction are shocked at the strange request. “We have only last week met the Power Minister and brought to his notice that consumers are expecting relief on the tariff front.”, said Atul Goyal of URJA West and Central Delhi.

“It has been confirmed that power theft has come down substantially. In which case, the profits of such savings must be returned to consumers who have been paying higher tariff for the last five years only to neutralize this deficit,” he added.

Residents have thrown up a valid query: if theft figures have reduced so much, how come power tariff has not come down ?

This query is finding echo in the context of two crucial calculations offered by the Delhi Government:

- First, the Delhi Power Secretary had categorically stated that power tariff remained high because of power losses– thereby suggesting that tariff was jacked up to recover theft losses from honest consumers.
- Secondly: it was also clearly stated by the government that each percent of power theft recovered translated into close to 90 Crores for the exchequer.

"Both these presumptions lead to the situation that residents want addressed; if power loss causes tariff increase, shouldn't theft recovery lead to a reduction? Also: if 1 percent theft recovery translates into 90 crores, why a recovery of close to 16% over the last two years or 1500 crores is not enough to start a downward tariff spiral " said Varinder Arora of URJA East Delhi.

Residents have long complained that the power privatization model was merely a transfer of monopoly from a state entity to private entities. “Now we are seeing a new dimension of corruption – this time at the hands of private companies with unbridled powers to coerce and harass consumers,” said V.N. Bali

of East Delhi URJA, adding that lack of competition has led to a cartel that collectively controls tariff fixation.

URJA will demand a Commission of Enquiry and a financial audit into the functioning and assets of DISCOMS to ascertain what is being done with the massive subsidies that they have been receiving from the Government.

“We have a right to know what is being done with our money, particularly since these companies have persisted in suspect corporate practices,” said Vijay Raghavan, of South Delhi URJA.

Yamuna activists storm Delhi Assembly in session: No MLA has raised the critical issue of water so far, say activists.

- “We are here to bring the issue to their notice and invite them to our 50th day of Satyagraha tomorrow.”

New Delhi, 18th Sept. 2007: Activists protesting unbridled construction on Yamuna and the acquisition of the river bed for the commonwealth games today created a furore in the Delhi Assembly while it was in the last day of its session shouting slogans against the passive manner of MLAs on the issue of commercialisation of the Yamuna riverbed..

Sunil Prabhakar who was waiting in the Visitors gallery stood up first to challenge the proceedings saying that members had time to discuss paltry issues like MLA funds, drains and lighting on roads but nobody had the sense to bring the issue of the Yamuna to notice. Prabhakar was instantly grabbed by the Marshall, gagged and taken out of the Assembly.

Thereafter Kapil Mishra, another activist who had also entered the Assembly stood up and delivered a scathing attack on the ruling establishment accusing them of being interested in sharing the spoils of the commonwealth games and caring not about a resource as important as a river. He too was accosted by Marshalls and removed from the floor of the Assembly.

Thereafter members of the opposition and the ruling party got into a serious argument about the issue with one side accusing the other of non-action and allowing blatant misuse of the riverbed.

The two activists have been detained at the Vidhan Sabha and will be in custody for three days according to the Sidharth Rao, Secretary Delhi Vidhan Sabha.

Sanjay Kaul, President, People’s Action who endorsed the action said, “We are aware that through this act an infringement has been caused. But we are also aware that in spite of a long duration of civilized protests there has not been even a murmur from a single MLA of Delhi on this issue. This act of defiance is the result of the apathy of elected representatives to discharge their duties in articulating the concerns of their constituencies and therefore the bigger crime is theirs”.

The activists distributed Invitations to the 50th day of the Satyagraha being organized at the Yamuna Protest Site tomorrow and asked MLAs with “a soul” to come and visit the Satyagrahis.

Press Release

RWAs welcome Walia statements: more proactive steps needed to check consumer harassment, add residents.

New Delhi, 12th September 2007: While welcoming the ‘inaugural’ statements of the new power minister, members of Delhi’s largest confederation of RWAs, the United RWAs Joint Action [URJA] said that they expected more effective statutory checks on the powers of DISCOMS which have led to a ‘martial law’ situation.

“While we are cheered by the pronouncements of the new Power Minister, we would like to ensure that these are followed up with systemic changes and not *ad hoc* decisions or knee jerk reactions to issues,” said Sanjay Kaul, President of People’s Action. “To that extent, we are willing to work with Mr. Walia towards a better appreciation of the tyranny that consumers have had to face over the last five years under privatization procedures”, he added.

V.N. Bali, President Ram Vihar RWA said that members would bring the minister up to date with the situation as of now. “Our meeting with DERC a few weeks back will now be followed up with an attempt to meet the new Power Minister. Our aim will be to lay out a practical proposal under which consumer redressal will be of paramount importance and seeking methodologies to ensure greater accountability form DISCOMS will be next on the agenda”, he said.

In this regard, Varinder K. Arora, of URJA East Delhi has already faxed a letter requesting a meeting with the Power Minister led by URJA functionaries from all over Delhi. “We have sought time from the Minister to apprise him of our stand on various critical issues from the consumer’s stand point which has been ignored so far by the Delhi Government,” said Varinder K Arora.

URJA zonal coordinators from all over Delhi will also present a three-point formula to bring DISCOMS under the scanner.

Press Release

- **Relax. Another young life was lost to a Blue line today!**

People's Action writes to LG, says blue line deaths lie at his door unless he takes action against the Transport Minister.

New Delhi, 29th August 2007: Seeing the apathetic attitude of the Chief Minister and the arrogant refusal to own responsibility for daily deaths by Blue line buses on Delhi roads, People's Action has written to the Lieutenant Governor of Delhi asking him to take action and demand the resignation of the Transport Minister to effect serious changes in the system.

The letter, which was written some days back, plainly says that the LG is the last resort of citizens in the state and now it is for him to take action or take responsibility of the inhuman situation where one Delhiite is destined to die everyday on Delhi's roads by state licensed buses.

The letter makes a prophecy that has come chillingly close to reality. Copy of the letter is attached.

Meanwhile residents of West Delhi URJA will demonstrate against the death of a young boy in the area today, once again by a Blueline Bus tomorrow. Details will be supplied later.

The letter to LG is attached below:

Attn. Mr. Tejendra Khanna
Lieutenant Governor of Delhi
LG House, Raj Niwas
6, Raj Niwas Marg
Delhi-54
Tel: 23975022 Fax: 23937099

21st August, 2007

Sub: Request to put a stop to the carnage on Delhi roads: specific action requesting seeking the resignation of the Transport Minister, Govt. of Delhi

Dear Sir

It is now over three weeks that we have sought a hearing from you on the shocking series of deaths by blueline and DTC buses on Delhi's roads. We informed you that some members of such families that have lost dear ones would also like your audience. We know that you have been occupied.

But, in the duration of the 25 odd days since sought a meeting with you, true to the average, ten people have lost their lives on the roads due to these buses.

Sir, it is not a matter of chance that this is occurring as your scientific temperament will no doubt also confirm: it is a simple case of unbridled license to the cartels that control the bluelines, and may I suggest, the transport department as well, if my friends in the press are to be believed.

Sir, it is not enough that the Chief Minister who has enjoyed an unprecedented run for almost nine uninterrupted years has not bothered to fix the problem, it is shocking that the figures of deaths every year that have now been revealed have been withheld from public eye for so long; for how can any civilized state accept an average of a death every two days and continue to govern as if nothing has happened!

Sir, it is clear to all that the administration is out of control of the situation and it is without doubt anymore that all the faculties of the Minister's calibre have failed to protect the lives of citizens of this state. It is now in your hands to stop this carnage and to do it without delay.

In the hope that you will act, we hereby suspend our request for a meeting with you, if that helps at all – but we urge you to immediately seek the Transport Minister's resignation or his dismissal through the means at your command.

Let our appeal not be seen as a knee jerk reaction; we make the submission on the basis of every logical outcome of analysis and which involves the issue of human rights and ethics and morality.

Find us another case, Sir, where 800 people have died within the tenure of a single Transport Minister in our history. Find us another case, where the Minister knowing these figures not only concealed them, but also *did nothing* to stop the carnage. This number is a conservative estimate. But it is akin to three loaded aircrafts crashing in the city one after the other – and would the Minister of aviation have any right to continue in office if that happened? Is it simply that these people are dying in installments and not in convulsive bomb blasts that makes this a smaller crime?

No Sir, anyway you look at this, the crime is too huge to be allowed to go unnoticed. And knowing the strange ways of governance in our country, forget punishment, I have to lay out a whole argument before we even demand his resignation on moral grounds. What has this city, and country come to !

Above all, what accountability can we expect from poorly paid drivers and helpers of buses when the fountainhead of the administrative structure is not accountable.

I do not like to so say this, Sir, but what is the other option – every life saved from here now on or every death from here now on will be to the credit of your decision, or the lack of it.

This is no time for niceties, or prevarication. Another man has been killed yesterday and a family maimed. If you do not act, another will die tomorrow. Families are being devastated, children are being orphaned and women are being widowed.

What are we waiting for, Sir!

Yours Sincerely

Sanjay Kaul
President, People's Action

Press Release

Transport systems needs urgent overhaul: Minister's incompetence is costing lives, says group.

- *West Delhi residents to demonstrate on Saturday 4th at Moti Nagar – 9 a.m.*

New Delhi, 3rd August 2007: People's Action has today said that there is no possibility of bus deaths stopping unless cathartic measures are taken immediately to streamline the out of control transport situation in the city.

However, the group believes that the dismissal of the Transport Minister is central to any change in the ground situation

'More people will die unless the Minister goes.'

"If we are willing to accept these deaths without assigning responsibility at the highest levels, I am afraid we are saying we are willing to tolerate incapacity and inaction and inefficiency even if it kills us", said Ajay Jain, Executive Member, People's Action.

"More people will die unless drastic steps are taken by the Government and the government needs to send a message that it is serious about fixing the problem. Unfortunately, as events have proved, the problem is the Transport Minister's incompetence of the last four years," said Col [Retd.] D.K. Shandliya, Gen. Secretary, People's Action.

'Correlation between incompetence and continuing deaths is being missed'.

Sanjay Kaul, President People's Action said that the correlation between incompetence and continuing deaths is being missed. "The Transport Ministry and department is in the grip of a cancerous paralysis and I can assure you that Bus deaths will not stop until the Minister goes, and a serious message goes out to the entire department".

In the meantime, residents of West Delhi will organize a protest demonstration on Saturday 4th August and march from Moti Nagar Metro Station to the Nataraj Cinema demanding action against those involved in bus deaths. They will also demand the resignation of the Transport Minister.

The Protest will start at 9 a.m. at the Moti Nagar Metro Station. Kuldip Singh of Kirti Nagar who is one of the organizers of the protest said that "We have to send a message to the Chief Minister to stop protecting a Transport Minister whose tenure has meant death for almost 800 innocent people of Delhi".

Press Release

Anti-Commonwealth Games Site activists set up camp on Yamuna banks.

- **Prof. S. Prakash will stay in a farmer's hut.**

New Delhi, 2nd Aug. 2007: The campaign to protest the Commonwealth Games Village site started in right earnest today with a number of activists, RWAs, NGOs who gathered at a press meet held under pouring rain and declared that they would not allow the Yamuna to be truncated for the sake of a 11-day extravaganza.

The Press Meet was addressed by Rajendra Singh of Tarun Bharat Sangh, Sanjay Kaul of People's Action and Manoj Mishra of Yamuna Jiye Abhiyaan. Each brought out the aspect of the issue that mattered to them. So while Rajendra Singh eulogized the river that traverses five states of India and claimed it to be every Indian's property and Manoj Mishra castigated the government for repeated assault on the water resources of the country, Sanjay Kaul said that the city is subservient to the river, because it existed before the city and that the people of Delhi deserved a clean and full flowing Yamuna.

At the event, while many members from Jal Baradari sang rustic traditional songs about Yamuna, other group members discussed the next steps in the campaign. It was decided that a meeting of the coordination committee will be held on Saturday 4th August at 11.30 a.m. at the People's Action office.

For the immediate term, it was decided that a 24-hour vigil will be mounted on the site to ensure that no development is allowed on the site and Prof. S. Prakash, former Professor of English, Delhi University volunteered to start the vigil by staying over at the site from tonight.

Professor Prakash will stay the night in the hut of a local farmer called Mahavir who has also joined the protest, being an affected party in the Akshardham land acquisition [grabbing] case.

The press meet was attended by Archana Chatterjee and Monika of the WWF, Manu Bhatnagar of INTACH, Kumar Onkeshwar of Ridge Bachao Andolan, Parminder Singh of Toxic Links, Atul Goyal West Delhi coordinator of United RWAs Joint Action [URJA] and NN Mishra, Executive Member - East Delhi URJA, apart from several supporter members of these organizations.

Press Release

Only one of five demands met: residents continue protests against incompetency of Transport Minister.

- *North Delhi residents comprising Rohini, Pitampura, Keshavpuram and Ashok Vihar assemble at Netaji Subhash Place today to demonstrate against failure of Government to protect lives.*
- *Member of Blueline victim's family from Rohini joins the protest.*

New Delhi, 23rd July 2007: After the demonstration at Jantar Mantar where members of People's Action and United RWAs Joint Action [URJA] demanded action on five points, the Government has moved to fulfill only one and that too in a half hearted manner.

“We had said that the Government should finalise independent agencies to undertake a fitness and roadworthiness test for all buses under its fleet and the results should be pasted on each bus. The Government has turned this into a family affair, with the same corrupt transport department officials carrying out the checks – naturally we cannot trust the results,” said Sanjay Kaul, President, People's Action.

People's Action has asked for the immediate dismissal of the transport Minister for his “failure to notice, preempt, rectify or resolve the bus menace and the traffic mess” in Delhi.

In addition the group along with its RWA associates has pressed for four other points apart from the fitness audit that is being undertaken currently. These were:

1. The immediate recruitment for new drivers with a new set of qualifications and an improved pay package for them. Re-employment of current cadre of drivers only if they met the new qualifications. Issuance of a common ID card to such drivers authorized by Traffic Police, Transport department and an independent licensing agency.
2. An independent licensing body selected from NGOs such as AA, IRTE or the such like with a long term contract for them to take over all licensing roles for the future.
3. Immediate introduction of buses with automatic opening and shutting doors with a BAN on opening such doors except on designated stops and a route map displayed inside and outside the bus with designated bus stops marked prominently. The same map to be displayed prominently on Bus stops.
4. Putting out on a public website the full details of licensees, registered owners, operators and their registration and bus license numbers, along with details of the drivers assigned to them.
5. The final point about the carrying out of fitness checks and roadworthiness audit including records of maintenance and fitness should be carried out by professional agencies who would issue certification of such checks and declare the next date for the check. This information should be available to commuters so they are informed and can be made aware of the fitness of the vehicle they are travelling in.

Continuing the protests against the sham handling of the issue, residents of North Delhi are assembling at the main commercial complex at Pitampura, across the Metro station to demonstrate against the Transport minister's criminal negligence to control the situation or correct the malaise.

“Our demands remain the same- first, the Minister has to go. You cannot preside over the deaths of one person per day and refuse to accept any blame,” said R.C. Kamboj of Rohini, which saw a resident being killed by a blueline a week ago.

R.K. Khanna of Pitampura RWA Federation, Rajpal Chauhan of Rohini North, V.D. Parashar of Keshavpuram RWA Federation, Ramesh Kumar of Rithala ward and members of Ashok Vihar RWA Federation will join the protest along with residents as a mark of solidarity on the issue.

East Delhi residents get nervous about the Metro: Ask DMRC Chief to answer questions on safety, traffic, hygiene and encroachment.

New Delhi, 20th July 2007: Taking note of some of the allegations made by residents from South Delhi RWAs that have begun petitioning the DMRC and the Government to take the metro underground in populated areas, East Delhi area residents - where metro work has already started – have now put straight talking questions to the DMRC Chief seeking an answer from him.

In a letter written by D.P. Seth of the Chitra Vihar RWA, he has pointedly asked if the reports of the south Delhi metro track being referred to the Group of Ministers [GoM] was on account of any truth in the residents' claims that the noise level, pollution levels and traffic levels would be beyond tolerance for residents of the areas next to the metro tracks and whether hygiene and encroachment were plausible dangers as mentioned by some south Delhi residents.

Seth has said that the residents of East Delhi are shocked that while the Metro Chief and the CM along with the Minister of Urban Development had found it necessary to refer the matter to the GoM in response to the concerns of South Delhi residents, no such consideration was felt to be necessary during the over ground extension of metro line in East Delhi.

Seth maintains that whatever damage the metro can do along its South Delhi over ground extension is nothing compared to the damage the East Delhi section can do. "The Metro in East Delhi is dissecting an arterial road that connects the entire Trans-Yamuna population with main land Delhi and the traffic figures in South Delhi areas are nothing compared to this zone"

Residents have also brought to the fore the issue of noise and environmental pollution. "South Delhi still has some green cover. It has huge setoffs along the roads and service lanes that are equal to some of the main roads in East Delhi – if the Metro can harm living conditions in South Delhi, what about us," said Varinder Arora of Kiran Vihar RWA in East Delhi.

Seth has warned that East Delhi residents would move court if it was found that the concerns expressed by South Delhi residents were true and that they would seek 'on-par' treatment from the DMRC and oppose the over ground line in East Delhi, "no matter that some pillars have already been erected, since public health and rights come first".

RWAs, NGOs, activists and citizens demonstrate against ‘License to Kill’ transport policy of Delhi Government: Residents seek immediate implementation of measures to protect commuters.

- *Protesters to light 365 candles - one each for those dead and under threat of dying by bus hits this year!*

New Delhi, 19th July 2007: Members of the largest Residents body of Delhi, URJA* along with various NGOs, youth activists and concerned citizens have today demanded that the Government stop the rampant killing of citizens by buses running under license from the State Government or face the consequences.

Demanding the resignation of the Transport Minister, “who has not been able to do a thing in the last four years of his Ministership,” members of People’s Action have said that his continuation in office is a “travesty of justice and an insult to those who have lost family members in road deaths for so long.”

“This government is in a state of paralysis, and it has nothing to show for the last nine years of its rule in Delhi. Things have gone from bad to worse but the CM is unmoved and people continue to die everyday,” said Sanjay Kaul, President of People’s Action.

“Today we will light 365 candles to signify the number of citizens who die every year in Delhi due to these buses – one dead per day,” said Atul Goyal, coordinator of URJA West Delhi.

Residents are demanding the implementation of a slew of measure to be undertaken immediately and threatening to step up the demonstrations if the Government allows deaths to continue. The Five point-demands are:

1. Immediately initiate a new recruitment drive: Revise Driver qualifications; enhance salaries and certify Driver using an independent agency. Re-employ existing drivers only if they meet new specs.
2. Hand out Licensing to independent third parties like the AA, SIAM, IRTE and other NGOs in the field. Allow them to establish Licensing centers all over Delhi. All Bus Drivers to have ID cards issued in conjunction by Police, Training Academy and Licensing authority.
3. Immediately replace current buses with ones that have automatic door opening and shutting. Publish Bus Stop maps on all Buses, Bus Stops and main line media so that everybody is aware of DESIGNATED Stops per route. BAN the opening of doors at any place except the designated stop.
4. Initiate an immediate inspection of all buses for roadworthiness by an accredited agency and conduct an audit on the fitness of each. Paste the Report on each Bus. Commuters have a right to know when the bus was inspected and when it is due.
5. Publish the names and addresses of all Owners of Buses licensed by the Transport Department on a public website within 24 hours, with bus numbers, registrations, and all relevant details of Bus, the Bus operator and Driver assigned to the Bus.

Vasant Kunj RWA raises alarm on overground metro: RWA writes to DMRC to take track underground across Andheria Mod and Chattarpur

New Delhi, 16th July 2007: Fearing traffic chaos and environmental degradation in the expansive *lal dora* areas bordering Vasant Kunj, the All Residents Welfare Society of Vasant Kunj Sector A, Pocket B&C has today written to the DMRC seeking a confirmation of the route through Andheria Mod onwards to Gurgaon along MG Road.

“Our information is that the metro will go over ground from the Kisan Haat just before Andheria Mod. While we have sought a meeting with the DMRC to gather more details, we have also cautioned the MD Mr. Sreedharan that any attempt to take it over ground from here onwards will lead to chaotic traffic snarls at Andheria Mod and the Chattarpur crossing, which are already intolerant to traffic”, said Amit Aggarwal, Gen. Secretary of the Sector A, Pocket B&C RWA, who has written the letter.

“Andheria Mod is a very critical arterial by pass for Delhiites going to Gurgaon from the MG Road side as well as Vasant Kunj residents who take the route daily on way to Gurgaon. Any over ground construction will not only divide and squeeze this arterial bypass, it will also seal the fate for future development of the area”, said Anil Sood of Chetna. an NGO group situated in Vasant Kunj.

Residents are also seriously wary of the Chattarpur crossing becoming a mess.

“The Chattarpur area is a designated religious complex with almost twenty to thirty gigantic Mandir complexes apart from a growing number of Marriage halls and Party venues. As it is the area is impossible to manage particularly during the Ram Navmi and the marriage season. Just imagine the chaos if the metro tracks are built over ground in this place,” said N.K. Vaid, the Secretary General of Federation of Vasant Kunj RWAs.

Environmentalists and activists have already warned of the impact of taking the metro over ground in many areas of Delhi. Eminent urban planner Kuldip Singh has said, “The Metro must go along underground routes in the city, particularly through busy intersections that hold no tolerance for road space occupied by gigantic Metro pillars. Even apart from this, metro tracks only create permanent skews in future planning because they are uncompromising structures due to their integrated construction plans”.

Anil Sood also pointed out that this section of the metro passes through organic extensions of the ridged area of Delhi and such high levels of construction is liable to disturb the ecological balance of the area.

Alpana Kishore, a member of People’s Action has pointed out that the DMRC must take an equitable view of residents concerns. “The DMRC must not have different yardsticks for different areas of the city. Like the residents of South Delhi who have petitioned them, the DMRC must also accommodate the views of the residents of Vasant Kunj and commuters along this section of the road to Gurgaon”.

For more information, please contact Amit Aggarwal on 9868095009

Residents submit memorandum to CM seeking Transport Minister's dismissal: Attack opposition party for keeping quiet on a serious issue.

- 4000 road deaths per year in Delhi: CM ducking the issue, say members.

New Delhi, 13th July, 2007: RWA representatives from across Delhi and members of advocacy group People's Action today waited out the delaying tactics of the CMO and refused to leave until the CM accepted their memorandum demanding the sacking of the transport Minister for his failure to tame Bluelines, and for causing death by being negligent in his official duties.

“Our thrust was that the Minister has presided over the Ministry for 4 long years and done nothing about the situation which has concluded in 4 deaths and immeasurable harassment of commuters at the hands of their licensees”, said R.C. Kamboj who led the delegation of 15 members from URJA* and People's Action.

Atul Goyal, a member of the delegation said, “We had informed the CMO of our visit yesterday and they refused to acknowledge our request. Today, we made it clear that we would not leave until the CM received the memorandum asking for the Minister's dismissal”. The delegation waited out the three hours before intercepting the CM as she came out and handed her the memorandum, demanding action against the Transport Minister.

A flustered CM while accepting the memorandum remained non-committal and denied any responsibility on the issue.

Members have also trained their guns at the opposition BJP for taking a soft line on the issue. “We have it on authority that most of the Blue Lines are owned on *benami* terms by politicians across party lines. Maybe that is why we have seen no demand for the Minister's resignation from the Opposition on such a serious issue”, said Naresh Agarwal of Bindapur, Uttam Nagar

Delhi is reported to account for 4000 road deaths per annum, which is the highest in the world and the victims are mostly 2-wheeler riders, pedestrians and cyclists. In spite of this there are no cycle tracks, no proper pedestrian crossings and the subways are few and far between and mostly encroached or in dingy conditions. “How many more people should die before the Transport Minister has the courage to accept responsibility,” asked Kalki Das Bhandari from Maujpur in Shahadra in East Delhi.

Castigating the performance of the Transport Minister, Varinder Arora, a group member, said, “Delhi has close to 50 lakh vehicles on roads. Each bus replaces 18 vehicles on Delhi roads when not operational. The Minister has shown his incompetence not only in the deaths of innocent children but by his subsequent decisions and knee-jerk reactions after the incidents”.

The Memorandum has stated that if the Transport Minister continues even after such poor performance it will set a dangerous precedent and residents will intensify their demand for his ouster through vocal demonstrations.

Let the Minister of Transport take responsibility: Resign, say People's Action group members.

- Blueline deaths won't stop unless accountability is fixed: Let the Minister show some integrity and resign, say members.
- Remember Redlines? Remember why they were phased out? Phasing out Bluelines is a knee-jerk, non-serious, emotional and childish reaction. Will a Whiteline be any better, ask residents.

New Delhi, 9th July 2007: The recent spate of deaths by rash and negligent by often unqualified and underage drivers of private buses as well as DTC and the pious exhortations of the CM and the Transport ministry to phase out Bluelines is a classic case of governmental cover-up without a serious remedy in sight.

“If this government has any moral fibre left ; if the CM has any sense of responsibility in her and if the the Minister has any sense of justice, he should resign,” said Col. [Retd] D.K. Shandilya, Gen. Secretary of People's Action.

“Accidents happen due to fundamental deficiencies in the system of training, law enforcement, driver in-discipline, poor corporate practices, low salaries, illiterate drivers, lousy vehicle maintenance and corrupt practices of licensing and permit delivery. In each of these counts, it is the Delhi Government and the Transport department that stands to be the culprit,” said Sanjay Kaul, President of People's Action. “The response of the CM and the Transport Minister only exposes the paralysis of governance that has overtaken this regime,” he said.

Residents have protested the cavalier manner in which the Government is trying to cover up the seriousness of the issue in view of unprecedented regularity of such accidents over the past week. “ We all remember that Red Line buses did exactly the same thing and the Government then did exactly the same thing – it is only a matter of renaming the disease – and the disease is governmental corruption,” said an angry resident of Vikaspuri where a young boy was killed yesterday.

People's Action has pointed out that accidents can only be stopped by taking a number of urgent steps in conjunction. Arguing that licensing should be de-corrupted and passed on to organizations like AA and other not-for-profit specialist organizations, the group has also suggested that qualification requirements of recruits must be upgraded along with their salaries and all transport companies, including DTC must be penalized to the tune of a minimum Rs. 25 lakhs per case of death. “This alone will ensure that private companies invest in good vehicle maintenance, training and recruitment of drivers”, said Ajay Jain, Executive Member, People's Action.

For more information, pl. contact 9811014089

Press Release

RWAs welcome HC judgement on power privatization: residents stand vindicated, say group members.

- *Meeting of petitioners against financial irregularities & corrupt practices under power privatization to be called on Tuesday.*

New Delhi, 7th July, 2007: The recent High Court judgement indicting the Delhi Government for not taking cognizance of glaring financial irregularities during the privatization of DVB has come as a vindication for lakhs of power consumers that have been paying inflated charges for power without recourse to any relief of grievance.

“We thank the High Court for finally taking a serious view of the oppressive power regime unleashed by the Government of Delhi and DISCOMS on citizens of the state and look forward keenly to an immediate review of many corrupt practices enjoyed by the licensees for the last five years,” said Sanjay Kaul, President of People’s Action.

“It stands to reason that a privatization deal that was completed without a transparent bidding process, and which was castigated by as many as three different authorities for suspicion of irregularities, should be investigated with absolute seriousness and immediacy and punishment handed out those who indulged in corruption in the deal”, Kaul added.

The group has already initiated a compilation of citizen’s issues with various financially fraudulent practices that DISCOMS have managed to sustain through their one-sided agreements with the Delhi Government.

“These practices will be discussed at a special meeting called on Tuesday the coming week between over 40 petitioners who have brought these issues to the attention of DERC over the last five years without any relief,” said Atul Goyal, Coordinator of United RWAs Joint Action [URJA] the apex body of RWAs in Delhi.

Laliet Kumar, advocate and a resident of Rohini who has been also petitioning for a check on the DISCOMS said, “ That the Hon’ble Court has singled out the DERC for its supplicant role vis-à-vis DISCOMS is a stunning compromise of the very nature of the commission: as regulator and a protector of consumer interest”.

Group members have also discussed plans to call an all-party meeting of diverse political parties on this issue. “ It is imperative now that the recommendations of the PAC report are finally implemented”, said B.S Sachdeva former Executive Director of Power Finance Corporation.

Power theft at all-time low - RWAs demand tariff reduction:

NDPL projects only 18% aggregate theft in its area: BRPL 18%: BYPL 27%: So why have the tariffs not come down, ask residents?

- *DISCOMS giving wrong impression on theft figures, says group*
- *RWAs to prepare for agitation - Power Secretary's note to be used in context*

New Delhi, 15th June 2007. According to the figures offered by private power distribution companies [DISCOMS] in their Annual Revenue Requirement [ARR] proposal to the DERC for the financial year 2006-2007, power theft is touching record lows of close to 20% aggregate between all three DISCOMS.

These figures have been revealed after deducting the T&D [Transmission & Distribution] losses from the cumulative AT&C [Aggregate Technical & Commercial] losses that the DISCOMS have projected to the DERC in their ARR affidavits. At an average of 13% as T&D losses [as indicated by one of the DISCOMs earlier], the filed AT&C losses of NDPL at 31%, BRPL [BSES Rajdhani] at also 31% and of BYPL [BSES Yamuna] at 40% convert to barely 18% theft in the first two cases and 27% theft in the case of BYPL aggregating to a little over 20% between the three utilities.

While the news is much awaited, residents have thrown up a valid query: if theft figures have reduced so much, how come power tariff has not come down?

This query is finding echo in the context of two crucial calculations offered by the Delhi Government:

- First, the Delhi Power Secretary in a Status Paper presented by him on power privatization in Delhi on 6th February 2006 had categorically stated that power tariff remained high because of power losses, that the honest consumer would continue to subsidize the dishonest – thereby suggesting that tariff was jacked up to recover theft losses from honest consumers.
- Secondly: it was also clearly stated by the government that each percent of power theft recovered translated into close to 90 Crores for the exchequer.

Both these presumptions lead to the situation that residents want addressed ; if power loss causes tariff increase, shouldn't theft recovery lead to a reduction? Also: if 1 percent theft recovery translates into 90 crores, why a recovery of close to 16% over the last two years or 1500 crores is not enough to start a downward tariff spiral ?

In view of this disclosure, RWAs [Resident Welfare Association] under the banner of United RWAs Joint Action [URJA] have now decided to take the matter to the DERC and examine the accounts with a view to securing a commensurate reduction of power tariff from its present levels.

People's Action has also cautioned media from relating figures supplied by DISCOMS as obfuscation. "The effort of the private parties is to paint a difficult situation for themselves using dubious terminology like AT&C to suggest theft figures. We have noted with great disappointment that some sections of mainline media has also fallen for it and we find it necessary to caution the rest," said a formal statement from the group.

DMRC behaving like DISCOMS : Metro must run in the long term benefit of Delhi not the short term interest of politicians, bureaucrats and Commonwealth games, say RWAs.

New Delhi, 7th June 2007: RWAs have reacted with umbrage at the reported 'survey' by DMRC allegedly suggesting that residents wanted the metro link to go above ground quoting the logic of delay of the commonwealth games.

“The context of the survey is a dead giveaway: I want to meet any person who suggests that the long term interest of Delhi should be compromised by the undue hurry of DMRC for an 11-day event”, said Wing Commander J.S. Chadda of the East of Kailash RWA Federation and Coordinator of South Delhi URJA*.

Sanjay Kaul, President, People's Action said, “The unusual activism of the DMRC in this matter is abnormal. The Metro is for the people of Delhi and if it is expected to be running for the next 100 years, why is the DMRC so concerned about the Commonwealth Games in two years time ”.

Residents are peeved particularly at the manner in which the Metro is taken underground in VIP areas but over ground where the big shots do not live. “A mere stretch of 3.5 kms underground will not bring the heavens down. In fact if the DMRC says it cannot manage this, we will also have to start questioning its capacity to deliver the entire network,” said D.B. Sood, General Secretary of Kailash Colony RWA.

Aplana Kishore, Convenor of New Delhi People's Alliance - a collective of over 30 NGOs, and associations of Delhi - said, “ The survey that DMRC has released that indicates 80% public support for an overhead Metro line is invalid. The issue is not what different sections of the public may like – instant transport, squatters' rights, free electricity, more PVR cinemas, hawking rights, the right to spit in public or litter where they want. The issue is the very future of the city and what will be the enormous environmental price it will pay for an overhead Metro.”

RWA representatives meet LG: Complain of legal vacuum on commercialisation. Support sought on Resident Ward Committee [RWC] formation, DURA and rehabilitation of sealing affected people.

- *Overground Metro in South Delhi a bad idea, say members.*

New Delhi, 29th May 2007: A 10-member delegation led by People's Action, including 7 Zonal Representatives of Delhi's largest RWA federation, United RWAs Joint Action [URJA] and two from NDPA today met the Lieutenant Governor Tejendra Khanna at his office to petition for stopping rampant commercialization due to notifications issued by MCD and the situation caused by the notification of the MPD 2021.

"Residents have complained," argued D.M. Narang of URJA Central Delhi, "that the situation created by the impasse between the MCD, the MoUD and the Court's orders had only created more confusion."

"Nobody knows what is legal and what is not, with the result that the same inspector raj is back and everyone is again at the mercy of corrupt MCD officials", said Atul Goyal of URJA West Delhi

Dhirendra Krishna, URJA member from Safdarjung Development Area brought the point about DDA Colonies where stringency of rules had led to growing illegality within colonies. V.D. Parashar from URJA North Delhi complained about the lack of DDA Convenient Shopping Complexes being mostly defunct and instead shops had started running from houses, while Sushil Kumar from URJA Dwarka echoed similar issues. R.C. Kamboj from URJA Rohini brought encroachments on DDA land to the notice of the LG.

Wing Commander J.S. Chadda from URJA South Delhi said that the idea of bringing URJA representatives from all across Delhi was to showcase the collective concerns of residents everywhere with the shape that the situation in the city was taking and the attempt to give legal sanction to rampant commercialization.

The LG expressed support for the idea of creating Resident Ward Committees in each ward as a local consultative group. The LG's emphasis on creating a Delhi Urban Regulatory Authority [DURA] found a lot of support and it was suggested that until the DURA came into place, the MPD 2021 should be held in abeyance.

The delegation led by Sanjay Kaul, President, People's Action also had members of the New Delhi People's Alliance [NDPA] in it who argued against the metro construction without thought for Delhi's urban planning requirements. Alpana Kishore was particularly critical of the entire metro network as a critical mistake given Delhi's organic structure. Noted urban planner Kuldip Singh, also from NDPA, said that the MPD 2021 was opening the floodgates for 'induced commercialization' and that the city would never be able to recover the onslaught if the plan came to pass.

Kaul ended the 1-hour meeting with a request to the LG for allocating a plan for the rehabilitation of all those traders, consultants, professionals who were affected by sealing and said that People's Action would put a proposal before the LG soon on the issue.

For list of attendees, pl. see below.

Meeting with LG on 29th May at 12 noon: Attendees

1. *Mr. Sanjay Kaul, President, People's Action*
2. *Mr. Atul Goyal, Coordinator West Delhi URJA*
3. *Mr. D.M. Narang, Coordinator Central Delhi URJA*

4. *Mr. V.D. Parashar, Coordinator North Delhi URJA*
 5. *Mr. R.C. Kamboj, Coordinator Rohini URJA*
 6. *Mr. Sushil Kumar, representing URJA Dwarka*
 7. *Mr. Dharendra Krishna, representing DDA Flats Associations of Delhi.*
 8. *Wing Commander J.S. Chadda, Coordinator South Delhi URJA*
 9. *Ms. Alpana Kishore, Coordinator, NDPA*
- Mr Kuldip Singh, eminent Town Planner and Member NDPA*

Grievance Cells - all hype and no hope: Where is the redressal, ask residents: accuse Government of non-seriousness, apathy to their complaints.

New Delhi, 21st May 2007: It is the season of Grievance Cells. The CM has one, the Transport Minister has one, the Power minister has more than one - now even the LG has his very own 'Listening Post'. It would seem that the Government has grown an extra sensitive skin just as the elections draw closer, but apparently the skin is already peeling!

Half a dozen grievance cells notwithstanding, residents are shuffling from pillar to listening post trying to get themselves heard but there seems to be no change on the ground. Half page colour advertisements are placed with generous frequency by the Delhi Government, its ministries, Delhi Transco and latest by Lt Governor of Delhi who has started a LG's Listening post, where one can dial a common number to solve citizens' problems with various departments including MCD, DDA, registrar of societies, auto/taxi problem, Delhi police, DJB and above all power related problems.

Most of these Public grievances cells opened by Various Delhi government departments and Delhi Chief Minister Shiela Dikshit are themselves becoming a problem for the citizens as they are proving to be ineffective after generating high hopes for the complainants. Increasingly, residents are being let down on such help-lines.

Varinder Arora, a resident of Kiran Vihar in East Delhi has complained to Delhi chief Minister's grievances cell and DDA about illegal encroachments on DDA land in the colony. After much follow up Arora received a copy of a letter was received from Delhi Chief Minister addressed to DDA to look into the matter. Thereafter, he received copy of a letter from DDA addressed to Chief minister's office and Chief engineer, East Delhi Zone, DDA saying that illegal encroachments will be removed soon in November lat year. Till date, even after repeated reminders no action has been taken. "The problem still remains where it was," says Arora. "Of course I have a lot of official correspondence now to keep as mementos," he adds sarcastically.

Sunil Babbar a resident of Jhilmil colony went to public grievances cell of Delhi Transco at Minto Road in a power theft case. After a couple of days he was asked to contact the BSES office. On the internet his complaint was shown as 'Resolved.' Babbar simultaneously received an email from BSES Yamuna assuring him that the matter will be resolved mutually. When he reached BSES office, he was reprimanded for taking the matter to grievances cell, threatened with immediate power dis-connection and was made to pay the entire amount within a few days.

Residents are not only tired of this hoax, they are becoming increasingly wary. In yet another instance, a complainant found herself at the wrong end of the DISCOMS wrath for going to the Grievance Cell. Vidya Devi of Mayur Vihar Phase II approached power grievances cell against a case of power theft imposed on her. The BSES office reverted back to her and arranged a meeting but when she reached BSES office, she was bullied and a new power bill of Rs. 40,000 was handed over to her saying that earlier bill of Rs. 15,000 was wrong and under-billed by mistake. After paying all bills and taking a no objection certificate, now she has been served a legal notice and power disconnection threat by BSES.

The power grievances cell is showing 97 % cases resolved and coloured half page advertisements are issued regularly to give the impression that everything is running smoothly.

Similar is the case with Delhi Police which too has joined the bandwagon. After releasing advertisements with email IDs of police officers to be contacted, all that a complainant gets after lodging a complaint is an email or letter from the Commissioner's Office listing out a complaint number . Thereafter there is no record of any action taken, no communication or end result

Of course the shining example remains the CM's office; every complaint is responded to dutifully with a letter informing the complainant that his or her complaint has been forwarded to the appropriate office or official for action after which there is the all too familiar dead silence!

Similarly, the Autorickshaw help line created by the Transport Department is an eye wash, say residents. First one has to go through a harrowing time with autowallahas who cheat and misbehave, and then to have this joke played on us is shameful. Residents claim have never heard of anyone having their grievances redressed – never a call received back that the complaint was actioned on or that the driver was punished and the evidence that there is no reduction in cheating by autos or any improvement in their brazen attitude.

RWAs in Delhi claim that the grievance collection and redressal regime introduced by the government of Delhi is basically a PR Department product. It is merely a clever methodology of allowing harassed consumers to vent their ire without any intention of doing anything about it.

Many times residents also think that they have done their duty by reporting a misdemeanor or illegality not realizing that that is where the entire process ends.

Residents complain that the entire system is shrouded in secrecy. There is no procedural mechanism available with consumers to know how many or how often their grievances are actually redressed. The call centers, the operators, the website, the software is all theirs - they can do what they want, show what they want as redressed while nothing really changes.

Monitoring Committee to accept anonymous complaints: Concentrated plan for removal of encroachments in East of Kailash proposed by RWA as a pilot project.

New Delhi, 5th May 2007: In a meeting lasting two hours, NGOs, RWAs and activists today put their concerns before the High Court appointed Monitoring Committee headed by Mr. B.L. Vohra and Mr. R.S. Gupta.

The meeting was attended by 25 group members under the aegis of New Delhi People's Alliance [NDPA] and coordinated by Alpana Kishore. Members of Consumer VOICE, Ridge Bachao Andolan, Nyayabhoomi, Manushi, Centre for Civil Society, URJA* and People's Action attended the meeting.

Calling for equitable dispensation of justice, Madhu Kishwar of Manushi made a strong plea for according rights to hawkers who she claimed were being persecuted as a result of lop sided implementation of the Court orders. Kokila Rangachari of VOICE objected to large scale and random notification of roads as commercial without basis and at the behest of powerful politicians or influential builder interests. Mr O.P. Sood of East of Kailash RWA exhibited documentary evidence of illegal occupation of parks and public lands in their colonies while, Shiv Kumar Gupta of Safdarjung Development Area pointed raised the issue of non-action and threats to people who make complaints.

Satinder Wadhwa, a member of a trade organization of South Delhi also complained about bias in the sealing process using property tax categorization of colonies, which he said was fundamentally flawed.

Varinder Arora of People's Action said that the Monitoring Committee must first ensure that all public land was freed of encroachment and that political parties must make their stand clear on this issue. "Elected representatives must be seen to be extending visible support to the drive to clear encroachments from public lands or they should be held liable for such illegalities in their areas", he said.

Alpana Kishore rounded up the meeting suggestinng that the role of the Monitoring Committee was crucial in attacking the problems of planning deficiency, negligible local area development and protracted misapplication of by-laws.

In response to the pointed reference made by most members of the threats issued to complainants, the Monitoring Committee has said that it would from now on also act on anonymous complaints and asked residents to directly send in such complaints to the email mc_mhc@mcommittee.com or call the members on the. Monitoring Committee office number 29840068.

The RWA of East of Kailash has proposed to carry out a concentrated campaign to clear their colony of illegal encroachments and requested the support of the Monitoring Committee at the implementation level. For this purpose they will develop a list of prioritized actions required in their area for maximum impact in the shorted period of time and place it before the Monitoring Committee. "D.B. Sood, Secretary East of Kailash RWA said "We will be preparing a list of actions we need taken at the earliest and prepare a concentrated action plan to rid the colony of such illegalities. This would not only bring immediate relief to people but also inspire confidence in residents of other localities".

Meera Mitra of VOICE lauded the role played by the Court and the MC in helping bring down the levels of commercialization in their colony of GK-I Enclave.

Press Release

URJA group heads meet MCD Leader to petition for formalizing role of RWAs through RWCs: Yearly ward level audit of accounts and 7-way split of MCD also suggested as part of reforms proposal.

New Delhi, 1st May, 2007: Members of United RWAs Joint Action, the apex confederation of Delhi RWAs today met the Leader of the House of MCD, Mr. Subhash Arya at the Town Hall in a representation for adoption of their three point proposals that have emanated out of discussions after the All-Delhi RWA Convention of 14th April, 2007 detailing reforms in the MCD.

As part of the proposals, URJA has argued for:

1. A yearly **public audit of accounts** to be held *in situ* - on location by every councillor on 28th February each year at a public meeting in each ward every financial year end detailing expenditure, works and balances in the Councillors account.
2. The constitution of the **Resident Ward Committee** [RWC] as a representative body of local RWAs from each ward and their registration as an official consultation group with the MCD, requiring mandatory meetings with the Councillor at bi-monthly intervals
3. The splitting of the MCD into **seven** divisions, each coinciding with the Lok Sabha constituency for better accountability and chain of command between MP, MLA and Councillors.

The leader of the House had earlier in a reply to a letter from People's Action asking for a yearly audit said that such a practice was in line with the established rules of the MCD. However, URJA members argued that such a practice is meaningless unless undertaken within each ward at a Public Meeting called by the Councillor on 28th February, each year.

Atul Goyal, URJA Coordinator from West Delhi, who led the delegation said, "Our meeting with Mr. Arya was very productive and are confident that he will advocate these reforms enthusiastically. We will be now meeting other MCD office bearers including the Mayor of Delhi after the 9th May to develop opinion on these three reforms".

Varinder Arora, representing People's Action at the meeting said "We will also be proposing detailed methodology in response to some of the queries made by Mr. Arya such as the question of identifying RWAs within each ward etc. by tomorrow".

The meeting was also attended by Mr. R.C. Kamboj representing URJA Rohini; Wing Commander J.S. Chadda representing URJA South Delhi; and Mr. V.N. Bali, representing URJA East Delhi.

'Time of the day' metering : The new mischief of Ms Chief Minister: an underhand way of increasing tariff, say residents. RWAs will resist 'pilot project'.

New Delhi, April 26, 2007: Resident's Welfare Associations (RWA's) will resist moves to implement Time of Day [ToD] metering that is being sold as a progressive mechanism to reduce power loads from peak hours to non-peak hours in their localities.

It is clear to all our members that this is a clever methodology to induce unsuspecting consumers into agreeing to higher tariffs. There is no question of accepting higher tariffs", said R.C.Kamboj of Rohini Federation of RWAs and Rohini Coordinator of URJA*.

"Media reports have wrongly tried to paint this as a boon for consumers when in fact the law of averages confirms that consumers will end up with higher bills - will you start using ACs in winters merely because the tariff is low and will you use heaters in summers merely because it is off peak hours," said advocate Laliet Kumar who is working with People's Action on this campaign. "Besides," he added, "why don't they put this scheme to work for industry where it is traditionally used".

Arguing that it was the responsibility of the Government to maintain power at all times, residents say they have seen through the new plan as a means to usher in a new tariff regime in a surreptitious way. "Why is the Government suddenly so concerned about our power bills. Let them manage the power supply before worrying about our power bills", said V.N.Bali, Secretary, Ram Vihar RWA in East Delhi, confirming that they would be making sure that all IP Extension RWAs are made aware of this 'nefarious plan'

Ravinder Singh, power sector consumer activist said it was another attempt by the Delhi Government in league with Private Power Distribution companies (DISCOMS) and Delhi Electric Regulatory Commission (DERC) to squeeze consumers and termed it as another move to 'Rig' the already fast running meters of harassed consumers of Delhi.

" 'Time of Day' metering will allow private DISCOMS to charge higher rate at time of Peak hours to be decided by Power Companies. The DISCOMS will be re-programming the existing Computerized Electricity Meters with no consumer protection feature. This is another ploy to hike power tariff by Delhi Government and DISCOMS" said K.M. Rai of Dwarka

"Delhi residents are yet to recover agony of fast running new meters and inflated bills, and DISCOMS have yet to win heart of consumers, allowing fiddling of meters to DISCOMS will further create distrust among angry consumers" said Rakesh Bhardwaj of Sheikh Sarai RWA.

Ashok Sethi, President Greater Kailash Residents Association [GRRA] said that privatization of power in Delhi is the worst kind of Private Public Partnership "We understand who the private parties are in this relationship, but considering the state to which the public has been harassed by the reforms in Delhi, it should be called a private-political partnership".

RWAs are particularly miffed with the latest policy of power cuts in zones that have registered higher power thefts. "Imagine this," says Ritu Bhatia of Vivek Vihar RWA , "They have the CISF, the Police

is with them, the power lines belong to them; it is their employees who fix meter, repair them or remove them, the transformers belong to them, it is their territory on which they distribute power but an honest consumer will now be punished for their own inefficiency!".

URJA has denounced the attempts by the CM's office to try and paint this failed privatization as a beacon of success. This lie will not hold and the truth will out – nobody in Delhi will buy this fraud that the State Government is trying to impose on the people, said Atul Goyal of URJA* West Delhi.

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You are liable if your tenant doesn't pay his bills, says DERC. PLUS: All-day power cuts officially allowed to DISCOMS.

- What is being hailed as the panacea to all our problems with electricity supply has some nasty surprises in store for consumers.

New Delhi, 25th April 2007: Consumers would do well to read carefully Page 27 of the DERC's Supply Code & Performance Standards Regulations 2007, which states that if your tenant does not pay his bills or has huge pending bills due and either is deceased, or refuses to pay or absconds or litigates, you must pay it. That also holds for any property you might want to buy whose previous owners have not cleared their dues.

Chapter III New & Existing Connections under point 20 (2) (iii) states “ Any charge for electricity or any sum other than charge for electricity as due and payable to licensee which remains unpaid by a deceased consumer or the erstwhile owner/occupier of any land/premises as the case may be, **shall be a charge on the premise** transmitted to the legal representative/successors-in-law or transferred to the new owner of the premise as the case may be, and same shall be recoverable by the licensee as due from such legal representative or successor-in-law or new owner/occupier of the premises as the case may be.” [bold ours]

Advocate Ashok Sethi said that this was unprecedented. “By making the ‘premises’ liable for dues the Commission had taken the responsibility of recovery off the DISCOM completely and made the owner liable.”

Advocate Laliet Kumar said that this is in contradiction of the contract between the distributor and the subscriber and it would practically make selling or renting any properties under previous dispute of ownership or tenancy simply impossible. “Besides, says Laliet Kumar, “This matter is sub-judice in the matter of Madhu Garg vs NDPL and I am surprised how the DERC has been able to get this notified”.

Another shocking revelation is provided in Schedule II under Overall Standards of performance under point 1.4 allows scheduled load shedding of 12 hours *per day*, as long as it is scheduled.

“The question to ask is why bother with standards if you are going to allow them full-day power cuts,” asked Vijay Raghavan of Mehrauli RWA Federation. “And what was wrong with DVB, in that case,” he added.

Press Information:

DERC Supply Code and Performance Standards a cruel joke on consumers: RWAs, consumer activists angered.

New Delhi, 24th April, 2007: The Final draft notification of the Supply Code and Performance standards issued by the DERC has come in for a lot of criticism from RWAs, power sector experts, activists, legal and consumer sector activists.

“To begin with, it is inconceivable in any Country that the Regulator introduces a performance standard *after* the contract is due to expire or up for renewal. How does the Commission explain evading this responsibility for five years,” asked Ravinder Singh, power sector activist.

Advocate Laliet Kumar has pointed out that the DERC has allowed DISCOMS to retain security deposit at 6% whereas the Electricity Act clearly states that any such deposits must be maintained at ‘bank rates’.

Kumar has also pointed out that the DERC stipulates that 50% of new development charges to be billed to consumer, which begs the question, why should a consumer have to pay for augmentation of infrastructure since the DISCOM will use for other consumers as well. Worse, he points out, DISCOMS have already taken huge subsidies under the pretext of supply augmentation and electrification of new areas.

On the paltry sums stipulated as penalties in case of non-conformity with standards, RWAs are simply offended. “The prescribed penalties are worse than a rap on the knuckles. They are pennies compared to what these companies have made in the last five years – no wonder they don’t take the DERC too seriously,” said Varinder Arora of Kiran Vihar RWA.

“Maybe the DERC should take direction from the TRAI – just today they have prescribed a whopping Rs 500 to Rs 1000 for a mere unsolicited mobile phone call,” added Atul Goyal, URJA* Coordinator for West Delhi.

Sanjay Kaul, President, People’s Action said, “A cursory reading of the supply code and performance standards manual reveals the truth about the document”.

- Of its 125 pages, the last 27 pages are only formats of applications, while the first 17 are consumed in definitions and classifications. That takes up approx 30% of the manual.
- Chapter III, Pages 18-28 refer to New & Existing Consumers. Here the Commission has laid out in soft spoken language a slew of powder-puff threats for non-completion of various works – **all of which are revenue generating** – and possess no reason for non-fulfillment of the standard! Example: Giving new connections with system augmentation, also in un-electrified areas, temporary supply, transfer of connections, change of category and load enhancement. [All of these earn DISCOMS more money, why won’t they fulfill these conditions?]
- Pages 29-34 refer to Agreement and Misc. Charges. A list of services that the **Consumer has to pay for** – for meter testing, security deposit, development charges and inspection fees. [Great – so we thought this manual is to protect consumers, but it is more a recovery manual for the DISCOMS]
- Pages 35-41. Metering and Billing. Childish paras on how billing should be done. More precisely, **procedure of charging consumers** when their meter is not functioning, stuck or burnt! [Once again, all about how to make the consumer pay.]
- Pages 50-58. Unauthorised use and Tampering of meter. Favourite topic, it would seem – 8 pages devoted on **how to fix consumers** who cheat. [Nothing on how to fix DISCOM employees who fix innocent consumers!]

- Pages 60-62: the famous table [also repeated on pages 72-73,] listing out **procedure for lodging complaints** and a table repeated on page 72 of durations within which if DISCOMS should carry out revenue-earning, profit making repairs!
- Page 63. Stating that voltage complaints will now be recorded at a **centralized call center**. [Does that change anything?]
- Page 66. Talk about self-discipline. The DERC has laid down that reports of all complaints will be provided to the CEO's and the GM [Ops] of the DISCOMS. [So, we will never know]
- Page 67. Chapter IX. Parting shot: The DERC has also kindly arranged that the DISCOMS will **provide their own "performance standard achievements"** to the DERC. [This is like students giving themselves marks after an examination and handing it over to the principal.]
- Page 76. Meter Check. Now since this is a pain area for consumers, the DERC has given DISCOMS a **liberal 15 days to replace a faulty meter**. [Perhaps so consumers continue to record inflated bills for the fortnight]. Ditto for a defective meter or a meter that is stuck. [Does that make sense?]
- Pages 72-82. Schedule I. Guaranteed Standards of Performance. The great delusion –this lists out all the possible faults that can occur or works that DISCOMS need to undertake in stipulated – generous - time frames to rectify them. Check this: If a fuse blows or a circuit trips, they get 3 hours to fix it if you are in Vasant Kunj but 6 hours if you are in Vasant Gaon. Transformer fails, fault in distribution line, high tension mains fails, transformer fails - they get up to 15 days depending on the fault. **For a burnt out meter, they get 6 hours to merely bypass the meter** and go direct, and 3 days for a new meter! [Hey! This is back to the DVB days]
- Pages 83-87. Schedule II. Overall Standards of Performance. Sum total of all para's - benign advice and wishful tinkering on percentages of error – tolerance limits for errors etc – begging the question – who will record this data and determine compliance? Classic case: Point 1.10 of the schedule: DERC asks them to **'minimize electrical accidents' with no instruction** on what constitutes good, bad or indifferent performance.
- Pages 88-97. Finally something for us: Compensation to consumers in case of non-adherence to norms – *that the DISCOMS have no reason to not fulfill*, given that they are all revenue generating items! And look at the pennies they prescribe as punishment: Rs 10, Rs. 50, 5% of billed amount subject to a maximum of Rs 100 or Rs 250. [can't harm their bottom line too bad, can we?]
- Pages 97-127: Formats of applications.

Root of the power problem is in the agreement; RWAs want an enquiry. Government trying to shift blame; DERC role needs re-evaluation, say members.

New Delhi, April 21st 2007: Based on discussions at the RWA Convention of 14th April, RWA members have collectively put the blame for the frequent power crisis in the state squarely on the agreements reached between the Government and the private power distribution companies.

“To blame the DISCOMS for every malady that we see connected with the power situation is unjustified. The need is to re-examine the agreements between the DISCOMS and the State Government for power distribution and unless this is done, the CM is only crying wolf,” said Wing Commander J.S. Chadda, Coordinator of URJA* South Delhi.

RWAs are peeved at the manner in which every whim and fancy of the DISCOMS is entertained by the Government, whereas the five year long suffering of the people has gone unnoticed. “It is clear for all to see that the DISCOMS have been given sweeping powers and they are flexing their muscles at consumers. This is particularly true of BSES and everyone knows that”, added another angry member.

The Government’s role in first bending over backwards to accommodate the DISCOM’s wish list and then making appropriate noises about performance etc has not gone down well with residents. “ We can see through the drama, and nobody is buying the sham that the CM is putting out. Why is the CM threatening severe action against DISCOMS just when the terms of the contract is ending,” asked Atul Goyal of Karol Bagh RWA. “What about the last five years,” he asked.

RWAs are also severely critical of the role of the DERC. “The DERC is not a regulator, it is a defendant for the DISCOMS ”, said N.N. Mishra of Mayur Vihar, accusing the commission of being in thrall of the two mega corporations that have cornered the distribution contracts.

Members contended that the power scenario in Delhi has become a symbol of corruption of the highest order and clearly points to serious anomalies as marked by three different independent authorities including the CAG, the Standing Committee of Parliament on Energy and the PAC Report. “ The only way we are going to be satisfied is after an enquiry has been ordered into the privatization deal and the agreements signed between the parties”, concluded the members at a follow up meeting.

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Election laws work against fresh blood in politics: RWA Convention targets bias against independents, fresh parties. Blames EC and political establishment for ‘forced handicaps’

New Delhi, April 20th 2007: As a result of the extensive discussions that have followed the RWA Convention of 14th April organized by People’s Action in conjunction with URJA, members clearly sought to put the election laws in the dock for making independents fight an uphill battle.

“As if it is not enough to be fighting without a party machinery, traditional vote banks, money and muscle, the EC also makes sure that we start with a host of qualified disadvantages”, said Deepak Nagesh a candidate who fought as an independent from Uttam Nagar.

Candidates argued that independents had to start campaigns only after being assigned symbols which is hardly 13 days before election. “They prescribe 1.5 Lacs for an election making it clear to us that unless we have lakhs to invest and risk, we should stay out of politics. It is clear that a man of ordinary means cannot aspire to office,” said Sneh Bala, who contested from Rohini as a RWA-selected candidate “We are discriminated against and the EC must take blame for never representing our side,” she added.

RWAs also castigated the EC for repeated goof ups with electoral rolls. “How many more elections do we need before we get our electoral rolls in order. And when will the voter ID cards system finally be fool proof,” asked angry members. Most often residents of upper class colonies do not come out to vote fearing long winded searches for their names at the booths. Members said that it is high time this entire system was computerized and voters should be able to find their names on computer monitors at booths, at least for Delhi.

Activists have charged election laws as being severely supportive of existing parties and completely antagonistic towards independents and new entrants. “If the EC openly views independents as irritants, why not completely disallow Independent candidature. At least this way we will get one part of the problem solved,” said a senior members of an electoral reforms group.

Unless we create a level playing field between established national parties and first-timers, any attempt at improving the quality of politics in our cities will fail, was the general refrain of the members. Some members also suggested that the EC should be offering incentives to first-time independent candidates to induct fresh blood into the political system.

Press Information: Conclusions of the fifth RWA Convention in Delhi: Part 4.

Municipal Election results show impact of RWA influence:

RWA-selected candidates corner 5% aggregate votes: two to three times increase in polling in such areas. Middle class voted as never before.

New Delhi, April 19th 2007: Contradicting the myth created by various quarters based on limited information, the RWA Convention of 14th April became a good platform to lay down the factual picture of the recent intervention by RWAs in the electoral process.

Outlining the structured procedure developed by People's Action and implemented by URJA members in 35 wards in the recently held municipal elections in the capital, Sanjay Kaul, President, People's Action informed the house that the process had resulted in the proving of two basic tenets of the campaign objectives: One, that wherever there was a candidate selected through the RWA process, voting was higher by residents in that area. Two: that candidates that came through the RWA process secured more votes as compared to independents who did not come through the RWA process.

In either case, our point is proven. The involvement of RWAs in the electoral process has rejuvenated a dying relationship between politics and governance by challenging traditional vote-bank politics. At the same time it has proved that when they have a decent choice, residents will always cast votes and not stay at home.

Castigating the hurried analysis of some press reports, members spelled out the comparison between the last municipal elections and this one as invalid unless seen in the context of the new wards so formed. If you analyse the aggregate votes of the earlier wards you will find that the middle class vote was either negligible or abysmally low. A 30% vote from qualified middle class areas in Delhi today is in fact a four times increase over the voting percentage from some of these areas last time. Ask anyone who has the voting figures for the consolidated wards in 2002. At the very least, each vote cast for RWA-selected candidates is a vote that would have stayed at home, if the candidate had not stood for elections.

Members also argued that this was the first municipal elections that was drilled into the consciousness of the middle class for the first time due to many reasons - the recent failure on dengue control, the sealings and demolitions issue, and not to forget the campaign by RWAs to involve themselves collectively in such elections for the first time.

Collectively, all these factors made for a municipal elections which the middle classes just could not ignore. In fact, this is also the first time that traditional vote banks failed to deliver high voting percentages – due to many reasons – apathy of the Congress supporter and the invalidating of ration cards as ID proof. Therefore, it was the middle class voter that made up for the big loss of the traditional vote-banks and secured an aggregate loss of just two percentage points in the overall voting pattern, which otherwise would have been huge.

Similarly, an analysis of the performance of RWA-selected candidates in the 21 wards where such candidates eventually fought as independents shows that if taken together, such RWA-selected candidates garnered close to 5% of the votes in their areas, with a high of over 15% vote share in one ward.

Members said that the aggregate 5% vote that was cornered by RWA selected candidates is a fantastic achievement if you compare it with the recent performance of the BSP – which at 10% of the vote is being hailed as path breaking. If you compare a 20 year old party like BSP, its caste agenda, its millionaire candidates and their crime ridden background, a 5% vote share for RWA selected candidates without any of the above ‘advantages’ must surely rate as a brilliant performance!

Press Information: Conclusions of the fifth RWA Convention in Delhi: Part 3.

Division of MCD must on Lok Sabha constituency lines: 7 segment division necessary to bring accountability, says Delhi RWA body. Reformed bodies must be run on NDMC lines.

New Delhi, April 18th, 2007: Members attending the All-Delhi RWA Convention of 14th April organized by People's Action in association with United RWAs Joint Action [URJA] agreed to the proposal that for better coordination and greater accountability of elected representatives, the MCD must be divided along Lok Sabha constituency lines and not into three or five portions as has been discussed earlier.

Members at the Convention argued that there was no logic for the division of the MCD into three or five segments which is neither a geographical nor administrative division. The only natural division of the MCD can be done in consonance with Lok Sabha boundaries, was the general tenor of the meeting.

Explaining the rationale for such a division Sanjay Kaul, President, People's Action placed before the house the premise that "Today the poor performance of MCD or a councilor within his ward has no bearing on the electoral fortunes of the MLA or MP. This is because there is no symbiotic relationship between the elected representatives at the legislative or parliamentary levels with that of the Municipal body."

"By making sure that each MCD division is directly proportional to the MP's constituency, we will reconnect these two posts in a manner that will have an impact on the responsiveness of the elected representative at both ends as well as the MLA level," added Kaul.

As things stand, the expansion of MCD wards has made the Municipality Town Hall too unwieldy. In a House where 134 councillors created only confusion and corruption, another 138 councilors will only create more of the same.

It makes eminent sense to create seven Municipalities within each of the seven MP constituencies and have 40 councillors each : this will create smaller units which will perform better. For coordination meetings, one member from each House would serve on a central committee of councilors: this way a more orderly functioning could be achieved. This way the MP would also have to answer for the performance of the municipality in his or her area. Similarly, the MLA would also have to support the municipal body in his or her own way or risk a negative fallout of his performance within his assembly segment.

"With the recent delimitation and the rationalization of the number of assembly segments in each Lok Sabha constituency, this pattern of dividing the NCD will emerge to be a best-fit in the scenario," said Dr. Devendra Kumar of Pitampura RWA Federation.

Kaul also said, "This division should mimic the NDMC pattern where a certain number of Government nominated members must be made part of the seven MCD bodies across the city-state. In addition, we would also recommend that in each MCD division, a certain number of eminent citizens on rotation basis are empanelled each year for greater transparency and better coordination."

RWAs will now take these proposals forward in their specific areas with a view to creating public opinion in favour of these proposals.

[This ends the series on MCD Reforms that came out of the deliberations on the 14th April RWA Convention organized by URJA and People's Action at New Delhi.]

Press Information: Conclusions of the fifth RWA Convention in Delhi: Part 2.

Make Resident Ward Committees mandatory: RWA Convention throws up demand to strengthen local self government mechanism.

New Delhi, April 17th, 2007: The RWA Convention of 14th April organized by People's Action in association with United RWAs Joint Action [URJA] has thrown up an emphatic demand from members of the RWA body of Delhi for the dire need for formalizing Residents Ward Committees in each ward.

Resident Ward Committees were formed in 35 wards of Delhi during the run-up to the recently held municipal elections as part of a procedure outlined by People's Action for improving civil society participation in the electoral process as well as improving quality of candidature.

“Now that residents have seen the collective benefits of having a ward level committee of nominated members from various RWAs in their ward, they have made a suggestion for the formalising the structure so that a consultative group can represent the ward in matters relating to MCD operation,” said Rajeev Goyal of Tri Nagar RWA one of the members who had formed a ward level Committee in their constituency.

RWAs have suggested that such a body could be required to be registered with the MCD whereas the Councillor would be either an automatic member of this Committee or a permanent invitee. Residents have also suggested that there should be compulsory meetings every month, which will be attended by all members to discuss various issues at the ward level with the councilor. This is being seen by most RWAs as an effective way to maintain a working relationship with the councilor of the area.

Responding to the suggestion, Sanjay Kaul, President People's Action said, “This proposal needs to be implemented immediately to not only introduce genuine participatory governance, but to also improve the functioning of the MCD in a more transparent and effective manner.”

Atul Goyal, who has been entrusted with the task of coordinating the earlier submission of petitioning the MCD for a yearly audit has also been nominated to pursue this aspect with the leader of the house as well as other prominent members who can effect this proposal. “I am seeking time with all the key office bearers of the MCD over the next two weeks to take these proposals further,” said Goyal.

Press Information: Conclusions of the fifth RWA Convention in Delhi: Part 1.

People's Action demands mandatory ward wise annual audit of MCD spend: Councillors to hold public meeting at the end of each financial year to declare ward wise details of expenditure, contracted agencies, amounts paid, reserves etc.

New Delhi, 16th April, 2007: In a first in a series of path breaking decisions taken as a result of the RWA Convention of 14th April at New Delhi's India Islamic Cultural Center Auditorium, People's Action - the advocacy group that has federated Delhi's RWAs into a cohesive unite that is today considered the largest civil society grouping in the city - has placed before the newly elected members of the Municipality the demand that councilors present a balance sheet of their performance to their wards at specially convened Annual general meetings within their wards.

In a letter written to the new Leader of the House, Mr Subhash Arya, the group has recommended that this Audit be held at a specially called Annual General Meeting of the Ward, ideally on 31st of March each year to coincide with the new financial year each time. The letter argues that this event would be a time to present before the members of the ward the developmental works undertaken by the Councillor, the amounts used up, the contracts issued, the parties involved and the balance carried over from the funds received by the Councillor.

“The Annual General Meetings proposed by us in consultation with URJA* and the various Resident Ward Committees, is a logical step towards improving accountability, encouraging transparency and reducing corruption in the MCD, apart from creating a more responsive administrative culture in the Municipality, said Sanjay Kaul, President, People's Action.

Elsewhere, RWAs reposed faith in the proposal suggesting that this should be in the statute if not already there. ‘The concept of local self government requires such a proposal to be a fundamental feature of its operation. This proposal is the key to a cleaner MCD and amore efficient administration’, said R.C. Kamboj, Secretary of the Joint Front of Rohini RWAs and Coordinator, URJA*.

Experts in administration have also supported this idea as an urgent feature for Municipal reforms in the absence of an institutional means to follow such a procedure. “Until this becomes a statute or a part of procedure under MCD rules, we must accept this proposal as an important element in municipal management”, said Dr. Devendra Kumar of the Pitampura Federation of RWAs.

People's Action has constituted a committee to pursue this proposal with the Councillors for its early acceptance and implementation.

Press Information

Mani Shankar Aiyar is right to question CW Games: general view supports scrapping games for siphoning development funds in 'show-off' games.

New Delhi, 13th April 2007: Civil society groups and RWAs alike have received the news of opposition to the Commonwealth games as a wasteful exercise for a city without power and water for its citizens with some introspection., However, the growing sentiment is veering towards what has also been reflected in the statements of the Sports Minister today.

Supporting the statements attributed to Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar, Sanjay Kaul, President, People's Action said, "It should not astound us that the Minister has found a direct contradiction between what his official duties force him to say or sign and a feeling citizen who knows he is doing the wrong thing. To that extent, it should be a matter of relief that we have in the minister a man with a conscience and that official pressures have not blinded him to rational analysis".

On the reported insistence of other members and notably the support by CM Shiela Dikshit to what is being called her 'pet' project, Kaul said, "The CM is under some strange delusion that by organising an 11-day event she will achieve world ranking for Delhi. I am surprised she has not read press reports that put Delhi below Lucknow and Chandigarh on most scores", said Kaul.

The All-Delhi RWA Convention will now put the proposal to test at tomorrow's scheduled meeting at the IICC. RWAs are more or less inclined to see this exercise as patently outrageous in the wake of serious shortages of essential and fundamental public services in the city.

"I would like to see better roads, cleanliness, more power and water for us as tax=payers and I do not want my city to be subjected to improvement upon condition of some 11-day circus", said Varinder Arora of East Delhi caustically.

RWAs from across the city will attend the Convention which will discuss pressing issues such as power shortage, Master Plan 2021, the role of RWAs in the municipal elections and of course the expenditure on the Commonwealth games.

RWAs call for impartial review of Master Plan: Since most Councillors have been unseated, their submissions must be expunged, say members.

- *RWA Convention on 14th April to focus on MCD, power issues. Expenditure on commonwealth games, strengthening RWA movement also on agenda.*

New Delhi, 9th April 2007: Members of various RWAs are bracing themselves for a new thrust to the campaign against the imposition of the Master Plan in its present form apart from a host of related issues.

“It has been roundly agreed that the Master Plan was a tool of appeasement for various lobby groups before the election. It has also been made an issue of referendum by the Minister of State for UD and it has come a cropper. Therefore, there is solid ground for the immediate repeal of the Master Plan as it stands now and an impartial exercise to review it must be undertaken by the new dispensation in the Corporation,” said Sanjay Kaul, President, People’s Action.

RWAs have argued that since the Master Plan was subject to the admissions and objections of Corporators, the sea change in the ranks of the sitting members after the recent elections requires an adjunct review of the earlier set of submissions made by erstwhile Corporators.

Adding value to the chant for a review of the vexatious document, civil society groups such as People’s Action, Ridge Bachao Aandolan, Manushi, etc that have confederated under the New Delhi People’s Alliance [NDPA] have already submitted support documents proving that the Plan in its present form is simply unsustainable and the city is not geared to accommodate either the pressure on land or resources as envisaged in the Master Plan.

Alpana Kishore, Convenor of NDPA said, “The Amicus Curiae has already been delivered our considered set of serious objections to the Master Plan in its current form through member Advocate Jasbir Malik and we support the consequent observations of the Amicus as genuinely reflective of the concerns of the citizenry of the city”.

Convention of all Delhi RWAs on Saturday, 14th April at India Islamic Cultural Center

In the meantime, People’s Action and United Residents Joint Action, [URJA] Delhi’s largest independent RWA collective, have organized a Convention of all Delhi RWAs on Saturday, 14th April at the India Islamic Cultural Center Auditorium at 10 a.m. to discuss the new corporation, and means of strengthening the RWA movement in the city. The discussions will also have the issues related to the Master Plan and the power situation in the capital as well as the planned expenditure on the Commonwealth Games, on the agenda.

Press Information

MCD elections results a verdict against Master Plan, say RWAs. Power excesses and DISCOMS added to the angst, say residents.

- **RWA selected candidates take third position in five constituencies**

New Delhi, 7th April 2007: Reacting to the adverse results against the Congress in most wards of Delhi, RWAs have expressed the view that this verdict a vindication of their stand against the Master Plan.

“The Congress Party’s insistence on going ahead with a Master Plan designed to appease law-breakers, the builder lobby and the trader community has backfired in a big way and the election results are a clear vindication of our continued stand against imposition of this motivated document”, said Sanjay Kaul, President, People’s Action.

RWAs as well as civil society groups across the city had resisted the Master Plan as a political manifesto of the Congress Party which would lead to more chaos in Delhi.

Alpana Kishore, Convenor of New Delhi People’s Alliance [NDPA], a consortium of various civil society groups in Delhi said, “This is a sign from the electorate about the ground resistance to the Master Plan and one of the first things to be done now is to shelve it and start afresh with greater public participation”.

RWAs were also of the opinion that the cumulative damage to the lives of ordinary citizens of Delhi by the terrorism of the DISCOMS after power privatization and had turned the people against the regime. “ We cannot ignore the fact that power privatization has become the single most common source of harassment for the citizens of Delhi, be it the bills, the meters, the service and maintenance or the behaviour of the DISCOMS ”, said Atul Goyal, Coordinator of United RWAs Joint Action [URJA] West Delhi.

Goyal added that they considered the verdict a fitting reply also to the State Government for its policy of aggression against power consumers.

RWA selected candidates, who stood as independents in 21 wards, were largely carried away by the anti-incumbancy vote in favour of the BJP, but according to tentative reports*, they took third position in 5 wards, namely Rohini, Vishnu Garden, Bindapur, Shalimar Bagh, and Rajendra Nagar. The Vishnu Garden candidate Vinod Sharma polled the highest votes among these five with approx. 2745 votes against the BJP’s 3400 and the JMM’s 4001.

Press Information

106 candidates with past criminal records, 78 with pending cases. **Congress leads in crime candidature among parties. Independents have largest chunk of criminal cases. Almost 30% are semi-literate.***

- **50% have studied under class 10th.**
- Only 18 candidates have higher education tag.
- LLBs - maximum participating professionals
- Higher secondary, Graduates and law graduates have highest incidence of criminal records.

New Delhi, 3rd April 2007: According to data compiled with the State Election Commission on the antecedents of candidates, of the 2572 candidates who have filed nomination, 106 have had criminal cases filed against them in the past, while 78 have cases still pending against them.

While 35 independents in the fray were the largest chunk of tainted candidature, Congress took the honours among political parties – it has fielded 18 candidates against whose cases are pending, while it has 16 candidates who have had cases in the past. BJP came a close second with 13 candidates with cases still pending against them and 17 candidates with past cases. Eight other national or regional parties also had the distinction of fielding candidates with a pending criminal record with NCP and BSP both notching 7 such candidates, INLD 5, RJD 2 and JD(U), JMM, SP and Shiv Sena 1 each.

Reacting to the data, Sanjay Kaul, President, People's Action said "Even though there seems to be greater awareness among parties about criminal candidature, both Congress and BJP have maintained a quota of approx 7% for candidates with criminal records."

Coming on the heels of a programme initiated by People's Action to involve RWAs in candidate selection as a means of improving quality of candidature and bringing transparency to the process, this statistic has been received with disappointment in civil society circles. "Both parties must explain to the electorate what heavens would have fallen if they hadn't given tickets to such candidates", Kaul added.

While the data regarding education of candidates was not complete with about 10% of data still unavailable, the trend clearly puts education at a great shortage among the candidates. Only 1292 candidates out of the total 2572 had an education up to Class 10th where 368 were uneducated, 100 had only primary education and 393 had studied up to Class 6th and only 430 had finished matriculation.

There are 386 candidates who have completed Higher Secondary (Class 12th), 368 Graduates and 106 Post Graduates, and only 18 candidates who have had a higher education – Diploma, Doctor, Engineer including M.D. and M.Phil. However there were 40 candidates who were LLB's, making them the single largest professional group to be involved in contesting elections.

Co-relating criminal records of candidates with pending cases with their educational qualifications showed a strange trend where incidence of criminal record increased with education, starting with 1% for those with primary education, going up to 2.4% for those without an education, peaking at about 5% at the Graduate level [incl. Law Graduates] and falling onwards to 1% for Post Graduates.

No candidate educated beyond Post Graduation had a criminal record.

Rajesh Dokwal, Coordinator, United Residents Joint Action [URJA]^ the all-Delhi RWA collective said that the trend of independents must be curtailed for the simple reason that they exhibit poor educational backgrounds, maximum criminal records and in many cases are set up by opponents to either split votes or used as a pawn to blackmail other candidates in return for profit.

“The campaign to institute the 5-step procedure^ for candidate selection was developed to reduce the involvement of such candidates and allow for wide consultations in the selection of a consensus candidate. Even though the candidate is not affiliated to a registered party, we could establish a basis for his or her credibility through this procedure”, he said.

Involving RWAs in power theft surveys aimed at creating rift: Don't make us do your dirty work, say RWA members.

- *DISCOM area supervisors should be made co-accused in theft cases, demand residents.*

New Delhi, 2nd April, 2007: The reported attempts by power officials and DISCOMS to involve RWA members in power theft drives is being seen by most RWAs as a method of pitting residents against each other and making RWA bodies bear the brunt of the public ire on the mess in the power sector in Delhi.

“Why are they trying to drag RWA office bearers to disconnect electricity in such cases. Why don't they get the area Councillor or MLA along - after all they are the elected constitutional representatives,” says Arvind Mehta of Double Storey New Rajendra Nagar RWA irately.

Residents claim that the entire campaign is being run to somehow hold the RWA responsible for theft in their areas, a position they are not willing to accept. “As long as a consumer is paying his dues for electricity, any attempt to punish him along with an accused in his neighbourhood by cutting power to the entire locality is barbarian law and reminiscent of the British Raj,” said B.S. Talwar of Krishna Nagar RWA and the Freedom Fighter's Association.

Can't steal power without help from DISCOM contractors: expert.

RWAs see this move as making area residents pay for the folly of others, many of whom actually steal electricity with the active assistance of DISCOM contractors. ‘It is impossible to steal electricity without the direct involvement of the DISCOM employee or contractor. No ordinary consumer of electricity knows anything even remotely connected with phases and wires or has the ability of manipulating meters. This job can only be done by contractors who know the house connection well, said Ravinder Singh, activist and power expert fighting against corruption in the sector. “For every case of theft reported or recorded, the area supervisor of the DISCOM should also be penalized as a co-accused”, added Singh.

Prove theft, say RWAs before you take action on power cuts.

Residents are now confederating themselves to fight against the new oppressive rule of punishing the entire locality for power loss in the area. “What is the guarantee that the losses in our area are not through ATC losses but through theft? When the original data presumed by the Government is itself dubious, who will believe monopolistic DISCOMS that the losses are only due to theft,” asked a member of the Sheikh Sarai RWA.

Overall, residents are bracing themselves for yet another campaign against the ‘power terrorism’ practiced by the Delhi Government over the last three years. “We will have no option but to start another campaign to educate RWAs and residents of their rights and expose the nexus between the Government, the private power companies and the politicians”, said Yatindra Seth, of United RWAs Joint Action [URJA] West Delhi.

Press Information

RWAs demand immediate end to Discoms contractor system: a mafia has been let loose on Delhiites, say members.

- *Grievance Redressal cells will be ineffective as long this regime continues, say experts.*

New Delhi, 30th March 2007: RWAs across the city of Delhi have today forcefully demanded the withdrawal of the business practice of DISCOMS of hiring sub-contractors to execute jobs.

“This is a convenient methodology of evading the responsibility of the conduct of such contractors who are mainly groups of musclemen or hired toughs from various localities”, said V.N. Bali, President of Ram Vihar RWA in East Delhi where the BSES Yamuna has created terror among residents.

RWAs have been complaining with unbelievable regularity the excesses committed by these hired goons under the contractor label. “We have received complaints under 10 specific heads, starting from forced entry, rude behaviour and foul language, intimidation of residents particularly womenfolk of the house, harassment of senior citizens, threats, fake billing, meter tampering, meter reading advancement and pilferage with a view to create grounds for power theft”, said Atul Goyal, West Delhi Coordinator of United Residents Joint Action [URJA] a confederation of over 700 RWAs across Delhi.

RWAs have been under pressure from residents to find a way of stopping unscrupulous contractors under the guise of a DISCOM’s label to harass and mistreat bonafide consumers. “It is strange that DISCOMS want consumers to ascertain the bonafides of their contractors when they themselves are not willing to hire them as regulars,” said Sandeep Dutta Gupta of Chittaranjan Park reacting to today’s advisory released by DISCOMS.

Ravinder Singh, activist and power sector expert says DISCOMS do not show these as employees so that they are unable to claim employment benefits and they pay them on per ‘hit’ basis. “Through this system, they induce contractors to indulge in all kinds of malpractices as long as their aims are met, be it forcible replacement of meters, on the spot settlement of inflated bills etc.,” he said. “Even Grievance Redressal Cells are unable to come to terms with the volume of complaints piling up,” he added, suggesting that unless the contractor system was withdrawn, the problems would continue.

Vijay Raghavan, Gen. Secretary of the Mehrauli Federation of RWAs who has already held a protest candle light vigil against the poor power supply in the entire area said, “First there is no power, then on top of that these goons come and threaten us. The Contractor system must be ended immediately or else it will be taken as state-sponsored harassment of residents at the hands of a mafia.”

J.S Chadda, Secretary of the East of Kailash Federation of RWAs said that they would be writing to the DERC and the Ministry to order “an immediate end to Contractor Raj and relieve the harassed residents of Delhi”.

Sanjay Kaul, President, People’s Action said that the numerous indictments of the DISCOMS on this issue by various consumer bodies and the Courts, particularly false cases being slapped on consumers

was a sign of how deep the rot has spread. “The Delhi Government must remember that this system has already pushed a consumer to end his life. They must stop this harassment now”.

RWAs participation in municipal polls: over 350 RWAs participated; 21 candidates in the fray. A roundup.

New Delhi, 23rd March 2007: People's Action has today released a factual round-up of the pioneering exercise aimed at increasing the participation of civil society in municipal polls.

“ By initiating RWAs through a 5-step procedure to identify genuine, worthy candidates from among their own wards and to either put them up for adoption by political parties or set them up for an independent claim on the seat, we have attempted to challenge the existing system of ticket distribution and advanced the theory of a more transparent system of candidate selection”, said Sanjay Kaul, President People's Action.

“This exercise is a result of over four years of work fighting voter apathy within the middle class. Based on the premise that it is only when voters find a candidate worthy of their vote do they come out to vote, our campaign to identify better candidates and a procedure that involved residents in his or her selection was a scientific methodology to induce the voter's interest in the electoral process. It is therefore our thesis that in areas where RWAs have participated in candidate selection and where such candidates are standing for elections, we will see a higher percentage of voting from this segment,” said Kaul.

Of the 70 wards we had identified in the first instance as areas where there was a sizeable middle class population and where candidates identified by RWAs could make a serious difference in the poll outcomes, provided they can mobilize voters, 35 wards finally participated in the exercise.

All 35 succeeded in forming Resident Ward Committees made up of various RWAs within the ward numbering from 8 to 20 in each ward. Of these, 22 Wards completed the 5-step procedure laid down by us as a pre-requisite for declaring a candidate, but only 18 were successful in declaring a consensus candidate. Of these, only 9 were finally able to manage to withstand pressures of all sorts and have the selected candidates in the fray.

In all, over 350 RWAs participated directly in this exercise involving over 4000 members of their executive, thousands more as residents who participated in public meetings and corner discussions on the subject as we prepared the round for the exercise.

Apart from this, we received applications from over 150 candidates from wards where RWAs were either non-existent or not organized. We clubbed these candidates under the 'People's Candidate' programme. Of the applications we received, close to 30 were found to be worthy of interviews, about 18 were taken through a process of 'field tests' and reference checks, public endorsements, and finally 12 were okayed.

In all, this composite process has allowed us to identify 21 candidates, who have come through a democratic procedure, by consensus, without having to 'pay' for tickets, or exhibiting a capacity to bribe their voters by way of money or liquor and who are answerable to a wider group of residents from within their ward.

Highlights:

- As we had predicted, main political parties were forced to make public statements regarding not giving tickets to those with criminal antecedents [Congress actually declined tickets to such sitting councilors], be more transparent, and that wives of workers would not get tickets *in lieu*.
- At least in two confirmed instances, the candidate selected by the Residents Ward Committee was given a ticket by a major political party.
- Candidates were put through intense pressure by workers of both political parties and some withdrew in spite of being nominated by their Committees.
- The 1.5 Lac expenditure is still considered too heavy a burden by most candidates who do not come from either rich or political backgrounds.
- Polarization of many prominent RWAs along political lines came in the way of effective formation or operation of Resident Ward Committees.
- Pressure on some candidates continues even now, although the date for withdrawal has passed.
- Almost everyone agrees that the procedure laid down for candidate selection is ‘flawless’ and a democratic model for all parties to follow.
- It was a tough campaign to start, with considering the newness of the idea, but the all-round appreciation among the people has made it possible for a good beginning.

List of Final Candidates

1. Rohini (21), RWC 1., Smt. Sneha Bala, 9213416373, 64136470
2. Rithala (22), , RWC 2 , Mr. Ramesh Kumar, 9811629338, 27047900
3. Rohini-North (49), RWC 3 , Mr. Rajpal Chauhan, 9891196963, 27857016,
4. Pitampura South (53) RWC-4, RWC 4 , Mr., R. K., Khanna, 273226223, 9818027006,
5. WazirPur (67), RWC 5 , Mr. Subhash Chander Gupta, 9811709670,
6. Rajendra Nagar (149), RWC 6 , Mr. S. P. Gupta, 35784533, 9313884533,
7. Gharoli (216), , RWC 7 , Mr., K.C.S. Pillai, 9810582702, 9350936862, 22615117
8. Mayur Vihar - II (219), RWC8, Mr. V. Haridasan Nair, 9873434353, 22786352
9. Kondli(215) SC, RWC 9, Mr, Ram Lakhan, 9810808435, 22623274
10. Vishnu Garden (107), JKU 1, Mr. Vinod Sharma, 9810567310, 9213790070
11. Paschim Vihar South (57) JKU 2, Ms. Neelam Aggarwal, 9968305081, 9818323264
12. Madhu Vihar (148), JKU 3, Mr, Chetan, Sharma, 9213740822
13. Janak Puri North (109), JKU 4, Mr, Amir Chand, 9310540548
14. Mauzpur (252), JKU 5, Mr. Kalki Das, 9818703806, 22180150
15. Prahlad Pur (198), JKU 6, Mr. Sampat Singh, 9891254179

16. Kapashera (143), JKU 7, Ms. Vandana Sehrawat, , 9811426492
17. Shalimar Bagh(56), JKU 9, Mr. Mahender, Tandon, 9810159197
18. Saraswati Vihar(60), JKU 10 , Smt.Mohini, Bhatti, , 9811377036,
19. Pooth Kalan(25) , JKU 11, Mrs. Suman, Kabir, 9911526277
20. Uttam Nagar(127), JKU 12, Mr, Deepak, Nagesh, 9810220262
21. Bindapur (128), JKU 13, Mr. Naresh Aggarwal, 9212731192

RWAs of Trinagar, Ashok Vihar, Wazirpur and Rohini North wards finalise candidature: “People’s Candidates” nominated from Ram Nagar, Peeragarhi.

New Delhi, 16th March 2007: Resident Ward Committees of four prominent areas across the North, West and North West have declared their consensus candidates with Jia Lal from Trinagar ward no. 64; Ajay Kapoor from Rohini North ward no 49; Rajpal Chhikara from Ashok Vihar ward no 68 and Subhash Chander Gupta from Wazirpur ward no 67 making the grade.

Lalit Kumar from Ram Nagar ward no 87 and Gopal Kewat from Peeragarhi ward no 42 were also inducted as “People’s Candidates” after being subjected to a series of interviews and checks.

The number of people applying for candidature through the RWA selection process is expected to peak tomorrow with most candidates having to file their nominations today and tomorrow. “People’s Candidates” will however continue to be declared subject to their meeting the standards set by the group.

Vasant Kunj and Naraina RWAs finalise candidates. Three other candidates finalized under the ‘People’s Candidate’ programme.

New Delhi, 15th March 2007: Vasant Kunj RWAs brought to conclusion the 5-step procedure to identify a candidate for Kishangarh ward No. 172, who was selected after two of the three contenders in the fray withdrew in favour of the Ms. Lakshmi Dagar, the selected candidate. Confirming the development, Ward Committee members met at 7 p.m. at the B Block Pocket RWA office and proposed Ms Dagar’s name as the selected candidate in the presence of members of People’s Action. Mr. N.K. Vaid who coordinated the event said that Ms Lakshmi Dagar, a Naval officer’s wife, is a highly respected resident of Vasant Kunj and also has strong links in the nearby village areas making her a doubly strong candidate. Above all, she will have the unstinted support of close to 17, 000 voters of Vasant Kunj, who form the bulk of the Kishangarh ward.

In a separate ceremony in Naraina Vihar, the Ward Committee led by Mr. Naresh Ummat finalized the candidature between Dr. Kajla Bansal, Ms. Rakhi Mehra and Ms. Vijay Laxmi Rani after a secret ballot for Naraina Ward no. 152. An impressive gathering of close to 150 residents and ward committee members representing most of the RWAs in the area witnessed a well organised programme for the selection process which was held under the chairmanship of URJA* members. Dr. Kajla Bansal, the selected candidate is a well known and respected resident of the area being an MD, Obstetrician & Gynaecologist.

Naresh Ummat, speaking on the occasion said, ‘This is a new experience for all of us and the enthusiasm of the people for this idea is worth seeing. With this kind of support we have every reason to believe that our candidate will win the polls’.

In the meantime, as part of the programme to also induct deserving candidates from areas which have either no RWA presence or are not well organised, People’s Action has identified three candidates who have the potential to be ‘People’s Candidates’ and have asked them to file their candidature.

Accordingly, the candidature of Mr. Vinod Sharma for Tilak Nagar ward No. 107, Ms Neelam Aggarwal for Paschim Vihar South ward No 57 and Kalki Dass Bhandari for Maujpur ward No. 252 as ‘People’s Candidates’ have been finalized.

People's Action initiates campaign to identify candidates in non-RWA areas: 'People's Candidate' program to seek a new breed of candidates from *mofussil* areas.

New Delhi, 14th March 2007: In response to the interest generated among residents by the 5-step procedure to identify good candidates from within wards by RWAs, People's Action has today announced that it would also induct candidates from areas where there are no formal resident organizations or where RWAs are not organised in a manner to execute the 5-step procedure.

However, the group will reserve the right to put the prospective candidates through a series of interviews and checks involving some of the steps from the original procedure, namely a background check, quality of local support, experience and service record etc. before proposing him or her to be the **'People's Representative'**. Thereafter, the group will work to involve these candidates into the larger fold and give a fillip to the RWA movement in the city.

“Our idea is to provide a stark contrast to the usual system of candidate selection and the type cast politician. Our intent is to induce fresh blood into the political system and our objective is to challenge the existing political process by unleashing the energy of a new breed of people's representatives, who are closer to the people than to a party,” said Sanjay Kaul, President People's Action.

The 'quality' checks will be performed by URJA* group members and will involve local site visits in the areas where the candidate stays and taking first hand feedback from residents and by a formal interview with senior members of the group, apart from an independent survey by associate groups within the NDPA [New Delhi People's Alliance], a group of 30 NGO bodies working on issues of common interest.

Explaining the concept, Pawan Jain, Executive Member, People's Action said, “After we initiated this programme to involve RWAs in candidate selection, we found a dramatic increase in candidates sending us their bio-datas directly for consideration from areas which were earlier not on our radar. It made sense for us to involve such a rich talent pool for future consolidation of a group of good, clean candidates and impact the quality of politics in our city”.

Atul Goyal of URJA*, who is coordinating this exercise, said, “We have already received close to a 100 applications for consideration. At this point we expect to finalise about 10 to 15 good candidates who pass the quality checks we have established. However, this figure could go up in the coming days.”

RWAs finalise Pitampura and Rithala ward candidates: Six candidates in the fray so far through the process outlined for RWAs all across Delhi.

New Delhi, 13th March 2007: Pitampura South, Ward no.53 joined the list of an independent movement by RWAs to select clean candidates with local support when **Mr. R.K. Khanna** was selected from a group of four candidates who either abstained or withdrew in his favour. S.K. Sharda, Convenor of the Ward Committee thereafter declared him the consensus candidate for the municipal elections. The meeting ended late on Monday Night. An earlier meeting held on Sunday was deferred by URJA observers in the presence of close to 80 residents members in view of not meeting technical specifications, but was successfully concluded last evening.

In a similar exercise that took three sittings between residents and Ward Committee members, also on Monday night, **Mr. Ramesh Kumar** was declared the consensus choice from the Rithala Ward No 22 edging out the other three contenders, by the Convenor Mr. Man Mohan Verma.

With this development, the number of candidates fighting on the plank of clean candidature and RWA involvement in candidate selection rose to six, even as various other ward Committees were in the process of declaring their candidates in the coming days. So far Rajendra Nagar, New Ranjit Nagar, Rohini and Mayur Vihar-II Wards have already declared their candidates.

Commenting on the developments, Sanjay Kaul, President, People's Action said that the campaign was gaining ground as more and more RWAs were recognizing the importance of engaging with the electoral process at the level of candidature. "We have been meeting hundreds of people who understand the power of this process as an empowering model for RWAs and residents alike."

"This is also giving a lot of fresh faces a chance to fight elections which they were always wary of due to the influence of money and muscle power" said Yatindra Seth, himself a covering candidate for the Rajendra Nagar ward candidate.

New Ranjit Nagar and Mayur Vihar-II wards finalise consensus candidate: Rithala Ward to decide this evening.

New Delhi, 2007 March 10th: New Ranjit Nagar ward no 96 declared its consensus candidate last evening at a formal ceremony attended by ward Committee members and residents from the area. Mr. Amrik Singh was selected as the final choice after a small election by secret ballot undertaken to decide the winner between two candidates. The other candidate in the reckoning, Mr Sudhir Gupta came a close second and will now be a covering candidate for **Mr. Amrik Singh**, who works with Air Sahara and is an active member of the local Gurudwara Committee apart from the local RWA body.

Mr. I.F. Stevens, President of the Ranjit Nagar RWA and a Ward Committee member maintained a strict compliance with the 5-point procedure laid down by people's Action to ensure that the process was followed impartially and with full transparency.

“Seeing the New Ranjit Nagar Ward Committee programme, I am encouraged that this 5-point selection procedure will become a standard for the future for all elections”, said Sanjay Kaul, President, People's Action who was a special invitee at the event. The Friday evening programme was Chaired by Mr. Pravesh Khanna of West Patel Nagar and a member of the New Ranjit Nagar Ward Committee. The election process was undertaken under the authority of Mr. Atul Goyal of United Residents Joint Action [URJA].

In a similar exercise on Saturday morning, Mayur Vihar-II Ward no 219 declared the consensus candidate from their ward after a two hour marathon session which saw close to 10 applicants for candidature from the area. “ We have devised a system of scores that Ward Committee Members will give to candidates who have been given four minutes each to speak about their vision of how we could improve conditions in the area,” said Chaudhury Fateh Singh, Convenor of the Ward Committee.

Mr. Pal. Heading the election committee declared **Capt. Bhakt Vir Singh Dron** as the candidate with the highest scores. S.Paul and Dr. Ajay Rohatgi came second and third respectively and will now be the covering candidates for capt. Dron.

Pawan Jain, Executive Member of People's Action, in his concluding remarks said that the programme was managed in the highest traditions of the democratic spirit and congratulated the residents of Mayur Vihar-II for their dedicated attempt at selecting a candidate consensually. “This system that has been followed here in Mayur Vihar-II today will soon become the benchmark of electoral politics all over the country,” he said.

Rithala ward no 22 will select its candidate this evening at 5 p.m. [Call 9818395055 for details]

Press Information

Rajendra Nagar Ward declares its consensus candidate: S.P. Gupta wins trust vote. Mayur Vihar to announce results tomorrow morning.

New Delhi, 9th March, 2007: The Residents Ward Committee of Rajendra Nagar, ward no 149 created under the programme outlined by advocacy group People's Action in association with United RWAs Joint Action [URJA] has today finalized its candidate after a meeting of the ward Committee on Friday afternoon. The Ward Committee was created out of representative members from the various RWAs in the ward as per the procedure outlined by People's Action.

“We had received four applications for consideration. After extensive discussions within the committee and interviews with the four candidates, the Residents Ward Committee has agreed to the name of Mr. S.P. Gupta as the consensus candidate, with maximum support from committee members,” said D.M. Narang, the Chairman of the Residents Ward Committee..

Arvind Mehta, Convenor of the ward Committee spelled out the procedure as an internal evaluation of not only the candidate's track record within the area, but also his winnability and acceptance to the largest section of society. “While each of the four candidates we considered are well respected members of our constituency, everyone agreed that for electoral considerations, Mr. S.P. Gupta would be the best candidate”.

Rajendra Nagar Ward, which also consists of parts of Karol Bagh, has been a strong RWA bastion which has worked closely with People's Action all through the power tariff hike campaign and later, the power theft issue.

“In the last one year, Rajendra Nagar has come to represent the resurgent middle class power that we want to channelise for effective representation of civil society concerns”, said Sanjay Kaul, President, People's Action.

Residents of the ward are clear that they are capable of fighting off the challenge posed by the mainline political parties if they do not agree to support the RWA candidate. Mr Dhingra, a member of the Ward committee was emphatic in saying, “We don't care about political party support. Our candidate is strong enough to carry the ward on his own and we have full confidence in our members, our residents and our collective strength”.

Elsewhere in the city, Mayur Vihar II in East Delhi has decided to hold a Primary Election for candidate selection on Saturday 10th March at 11 a.m. at the Association Park, Pocket A, Mayur Vihar Phase II.

RWA candidates can affect results in middle class areas in municipal elections: Analyst confirms prospect of RWA backed candidates in municipal polls.

New Delhi, 6th March, 2007: Confirming the claims of various RWAs that effective mobilization in favour of their own candidates will have a major impact on poll outcomes, Research & Development Initiative, a research organization headed by Dr. Devendra Kumar has suggested that RWAs are going to influence results in close to a 100 wards in the coming municipal elections.

Without specifying exactly what the quantum of impact may be, or whether RWA backed candidates can actually win the seats on their own, Political Analyst & Psephologist, Dr. Devendra Kumar said that the municipal elections in Delhi will also be a test of influence of RWAs on the polls process. "Candidates put up by RWAs are likely to affect poll results wherever a strong educated, middle class bastion exists," he said. "They will buck the anti-incumbency trend and work against the BJP where it was likely to gain due to the problems pertaining to civic amenities. Similarly, some of the traditional Congress voters may shift loyalty to RWAs due to the sealings issue." Dr. Kumar said that the impact of RWAs should also be part of any survey attempting to capture the mood of voters for ensuing Municipal elections in the national capital.

Sanjay Kaul, President, People's Action, the group that is coordinating this pioneering effort to involve RWAs in the electoral process said. "We have recently revised upwards the list of wards where RWAs could impact results based on a strong middle class population in the area. This comment from a noted sociologist and psephologist organization only backs our estimations."

However, group members from various RWAs are confident that, in a vast number of seats that are predominantly made up of middle class clusters, RWA selected candidates stand a good chance of winning on their own." Why should a cluster in Rohini not be able to come through on its own," asked R.C. Kamboj who is coordinating the effort in Rohini, "when the candidate is coming out of a transparent process that is being managed by the residents themselves".

Group Captain S.S. Yadav, who is managing the effort along with others in Dwarka has expressed similar views. "If residents of each ward in Dwarka come together and put up a consensus candidate, the RWA candidate can win hands down". What is adding to their optimism is the reduction of rural voters in many wards, in the new notification.

In Mayur Vihar, on the other hand, the absence of too many unauthorized colonies and JJ colonies is giving RWA candidates reason to smile. "Mayur Vihar II is relatively safe for us," said N.N. Mishra, one of the members of the colonies there.

What is adding grist to the mill is an IB note reportedly acknowledging that RWAs could play spoiler in a number of wards in the city. Commenting on that, Sanjay Kaul said, "While we cannot confirm any such news, it stands to reason that intelligence admits to what we have been saying for so long : that a parallel political movement is gaining ground thanks to utter disappointment with the existing party system".

Rohini ward declares candidate selected by RWA: Ms. Sneh Sharma to be the consensus candidate; wins vote of approval from residents

New Delhi, 3rd March., 2007: Rohini Ward No 21 today created history by becoming the first ward to have completed the candidate selection process initiated by advocacy group People's Action in association with the all-Delhi RWA collective, United Residents Joint Action [URJA].

Speaking about the event, Sanjay Kaul, President, People's Action said "This is landmark event that will change the course of politics in the city. This is the first time that such a procedure has been implemented in the country and we are happy that Rohini has had the privilege of leading the way".

The Rohini Residents Ward Committee had over the past three weeks organized meetings to mobilize support for the concept of a candidate selected by the residents as a consensus candidate which were attended in large numbers by local residents each time. As part of the process laid down by People's Action, a Ward Committee made up of members of all RWAs in the area had to be first created, applications from desirous candidates invited, verified and distributed among the residents. Thereafter a "primary election" had to be held to declare the final, consensus candidate.

"Today's voting, done through a signature vote, pitted Ms. Sneh Sharma against Ms. Santosh Bansal. The outcome was a clear verdict in favour of Ms. Sneh Sharma, who polled 357 votes against 152 of Ms. Bansal," said R.C. Kamboj, coordinator for the campaign in Rohini. [See attached Pix: Ms Sneh Sharma, wearing the garland, with Ward Committee members]

Atul Goyal, coordinator of URJA deputing on behalf of URJA was also present as a neutral adjudicator. "The decision of the residents appeared to be clear and there was no room left for any arbitration or adjudication", he said.

The public meeting was also attended by Diwan Singh as an observer from NDPA. I am happy to observe that a highly disciplined programme was organized with active participation of all members of the Residents ward Committee and I congratulate the people of Rohini ward for this exemplary display of a democratic procedure to select candidates".

Press Information

RWAs revise target constituencies: over 90 wards where RWAs have sizeable influence, according to new list.

- *45 Ward Committees formed: Rampura, East of Kailash, Lado Sarai, Kirti Nagar among new ward committee formers.*

New Delhi, 1st March 2007: People's Action has today compiled a list of 95 municipal wards where RWAs are in a position to directly influence ward election results. "This new list is almost a one third increase on our previous estimate of sixty seats," said Sanjay Kaul, President, People's Action and comes after a surge of interest from ward area RWAs over the past week.

"We are overwhelmed with the response we have received from residents and area RWAs everywhere," says Atul Goyal, coordinator of the municipal elections campaign. "RWAs are calling up incessantly to seek information and direction on starting the process according to the democratic procedure we have laid down", he added.

"The voluntary response to this system of candidate selection is a very encouraging sign of things to come," said Pawan Jain, Executive Member of People's Action. "The RWAs are highly charged, and very keen to mobilize voters to exercise their franchise in the coming municipal polls through a series of initiatives planned by us – which we will reveal in the coming weeks," he added.

The Election Secretariat created by People's Action to facilitate this campaign has now received ward committee lists from close to 45 wards across Delhi signaling the start of the process of identification, verification and election of prospective candidates by consensus. "Our procedure eliminates not only frivolous applicants, it also ensures that communities work with each other to throw up candidates who have the broadest appeal in their wards", said Rajesh Dokwal, coordinator of the campaign in East Delhi.

Reacting to the recent statements of both the Congress and BJP chief's comments regarding giving tickets to clean candidates and various progressive steps taken by these parties, Kaul said, " This is precisely what we wanted and we are glad that RWAs are realizing that it is only their active participation in the coming polls that has inspired these parties to reform their systems. We now look forward to the end of the 'ticket-raj' and the use of money in securing such tickets, " Kaul added.

In the last week ward level meetings have been held in over a dozen areas of Delhi including Vasant Kunj, Kishan Garh, Raj Nagar, GK-I, Govind Puri, Janakpuri, Munirka where RWAs have initiated the process of ward formation. "Over all, we have identified 45 strong constituencies where RWAs are in a position to completely influence election results. Another 50 wards are under active consideration of the group that is evaluating poll prospects of RWA identified candidates, so far", said Atul Goyal.

Press Information

RWAs welcome date fixation of municipal elections: appropriate consideration provided to our concerns, say group members.

- Daryaganj Ward Committee formed - count moves up to 33.

New Delhi, 23rd Feb. 2007: RWAs that have formed Ward Committees have today welcomed the date fixed by the State Election Commission as being sensitive to the concerns put forward by civil society groups to the Commissioner.

“Our primary concern was that the election must not be held in continuation of any holiday,” said Sanjay Kaul, President, People’s Action, who had made a written submission to the SEC on this account.” Our experience and analysis has repeatedly shown that an election on a Friday or a Monday becomes an invitation to hard-pressed middle class families to take long weekend breaks. Therefore Thursday the 5th is perfectly suited from our viewpoint of mobilizing the middle classes to come out and vote for the municipal polls,” he added.

In the meantime, the number of wards where RWAs have formed Ward Committees to initiate the process for candidate selection climbed to 33 today, with Daryaganj also filing its Ward Committee with the Municipal Elections Campaign Secretariat created by People’s Action to facilitate the process.

People’s Action has also today written to the State Election Commissioner saying that the State Election Commissioner deserves praise for taking these bold steps and that civil society groups, and RWAs comprehensively welcome the ban on use of cavalcades and cars, loudspeakers, posters and banners.

“However, we want to emphasise that the limit of Rs 1.5 lakhs is far in excess of requirement. We do not need so much money to fight a local election,” said Sanjay Kaul, President, People’s Action , confirming that he had made a similar submission to the Commissioner today.

New electioneering norms for municipal elections welcomed: Expense limit needs to be revised downwards, say members.

New Delhi, 22nd Feb. 2007: People's Action, coordinating the RWAs participation in municipal elections, has today welcomed the steps taken by the State Election Commission to cleanse the electioneering process of undue spending and chaos terming the three major modifications as 'necessary and vital' to reviving the people's faith in the political process.

"The State Election Commissioner deserves praise for taking these bold steps and we comprehensively welcome the ban on use of cavalcades and cars, loudspeakers, posters and banners", said Sanjay Kaul, President People's Action. "However, we want to emphasise that the limit of Rs 1.5 lakhs is far in excess of requirement. We do not need so much money to fight a local election," he added.

"Our argument is that for a students union election of over 1 lakh voters, that requires canvassing in North and South campus and in colleges in remote areas of Delhi, a limit of Rs 5000 is deemed to be fit, so what explains the need to spend so much more in a compact, contiguous ward where the average number of voters is around 35,000 only. Even if we allocate for the seriousness of a municipal election versus a student union election, canvassing is canvassing, and a sum of Rs 50,000 is more than enough for a candidate to cover his or her area", said Kaul

Confirming that they would place their appreciation as well as their reservations on the spend on record in a letter to the Commissioner, Kaul added that all parties will stand to gain with these reforms in the long run.

RWAs from various colonies in the city have echoed the sentiments. "Finally, we can visualize an election where issues and concepts will have center stage. Not band-*baaja* as had been happening for so many years," said Wing Commander J.S. Chadda of the East of Kailash Federation.

Many prospective candidates are also relieved at the fact that there will not be pressure to match some of the big spenders in the election. " This will allow clean and deserving candidates to have a good chance at fighting elections for the first time," said one ticket aspirant without wishing to be named.

Renu Rocha of Greater Kailash also welcomed the decision to ban posters and loud speakers saying that " The mess created by elections is an eyesore for weeks and months after elections are over, and loud speakers should not be allowed at any cost, particularly during a time when school and college exams are under way".

Press Information

12 more Resident Ward Committees formed by RWAs for municipal elections: Nomination process begins in Rajendra Nagar ward. Party ticket aspirants also want to enter fray.

New Delhi, 22nd Feb. 2007: RWAs from 4 wards of Ashok Vihar, 5 wards of Dwarka, Naraina, Kotla Mubarakpur and Mayur Vihar-II have finalized and submitted their Resident Ward Committee lists to the Municipal Election Campaign Secretariat created by People's Action today. With this addition, Resident Ward Committees have now been formed in 32 wards of the city.

“We have identified over 80 wards where there is sizeable presence of middle class voters and organized RWAs and it is logical that RWAs in these areas will want to participate actively in a process that is attempting to cleanse politics and improve performance of councilors”, said Sanjay Kaul, President, People's Action.

In the meantime, ward committees that were constituted in the first lot have begun the process of inviting aspirants for candidature. Rajendra Nagar ward committee was the first off the block on Wednesday in starting the process of inviting applications for candidature. Arvind Mehta, coordinator of the Committee has asked for a week to finish the process of nomination and evaluation after which the nominations will be forwarded to a three-member expert panel constituted by People's Action to review the applications.

Ward Committees are under formation in various areas across the length and breadth of the city, buoyed by the empowerment that this process has brought for RWAs. “More ward committees are being formed in various wards of the city and going by the enthusiasm of residents and RWAs alike, we expect that there will be unprecedented participation of voters in these constituencies,” said Atul Goyal, coordinator of United RWAs Joint Action [URJA] a network of over 500 RWAs across Delhi.

Interestingly, many ward committees are being approached by political party ticket aspirants who are expressing a willingness to come through the procedure outlined by People's Action for RWAs. “We see this as a positive sign and an indication that our process is finding broad based appeal for its impartial evaluation of the candidates' support within the constituency,” said Sanjay Kaul on the development.

Group members also point to the systemic correction this process is bringing to the party system in as much that many ticket aspirants now see a ray of hope for themselves not having the ware withal to 'pay' for tickets.

Press Information

Minister's statements unfounded say RWAs : lack of enforcement of law cannot be the pretext to change laws. Master Plan is an attempt to salvage votes, say residents.

New Delhi, 20th Feb. 2007: RWAs and members of RWA bodies have reacted with puzzlement at the reported statements of the Minister of Urban development suggesting that if so many people were breaking the law, it was the law that was at fault. "This is akin to suggesting that if there were so many terrorist attacks in the last year in Kashmir, it was the accession of Kashmir to India that was at fault and needs to be changed", said Sanjay Kaul, President, People's Action,

"Whereas we know that it is the conducive corruption between different arms of the government and the administration – between the MCD, the politicians and the law and order machinery - that has created the situation", he added.

"This is a shocking statement and smacks of a definite bias in the mind of the Minister towards the trader lobby," said Wing Commander J.S. Chadda, South Delhi coordinator of the United RWAs Joint Action, a network of over 500 RWAs across Delhi.

Rajesh Dokwal, representing the East Delhi RWAs was more forthcoming. "Why is the Minister and the Government trying so hard to sell the Master Plan to us? I believe we are well aware of what this plan means for all of us and if there is all round resistance to the plan, the Minister should have the courage to admit that residents have seen through their plan to salvage votes in the forthcoming elections".

Residents across the city have termed the Master Plan a Disaster Plan devised only to sustain the Congress Party's election prospects.

Civil society groups under the New Delhi People's Alliance [NDPA] through its coordinator, Alpana Kishore said "This plan has all the ingredients to promote an unsustainable dream city that will never see the light of day simply because of its inherent contradictions - it has no water, no power, no traffic sustaining capacity and it will crash under its own burden, sooner rather than later".

RWAs form Ward Committees in 20 wards: Process of inviting candidate applications for municipal elections to start. Procedure is path-breaking, say RWA members.

New Delhi, 16th Feb. 2007: In a strong vindication of the exercise of inducing active participation of RWAs into the municipal election process, RWAs from 20 ward areas of Delhi have submitted their list of Ward Committee members to the Secretariat created specially by People's Action to support the campaign for good governance.

“The coming weekend will see the formation of another lot of Ward Committees as per plans of various areas to hold confirmation meetings on the issue,” said Atul Goyal, coordinator of the campaign and a member of the United RWAs Joint Action [URJA], an apex network of over 500 Resident Welfare Associations across Delhi.

Ward Committees have been formed in three wards in Rohini [wards 21, 49, 51] , Tri Nagar [ward 61], Pitampura [ward 54], Jama Masjid [ward 79], Minto Road [Ward 81], Kucha Pandit [ward 82], Bazaar Sita Ram [ward 83], Turkman Gate [ward 84], Idgah Road [ward 85], Ballimaran [ward 86], Ram Nagar [ward 87], Paharganj [ward 89], Model Basti [ward 90], Rajendra Nagar [ward 149], Pandav Nagar [ward 224] , Mayur Vihar III–Kondli [ward 215], Mehrauli [ward 170] and New Ranjit Nagar [ward 96]

R.C. Kamboj, coordinator of the entire exercise in Rohini has reported high levels of enthusiasm on the exercise. “ Residents have no faith in established parties or politicians and therefore this system of increasing the say of residents in candidate selection has found many supporters”, he said.

R.N. Bohra coordinating the Central Delhi Ward Committees also expressed huge support for the mechanism to send local, dependable candidates to the Municipality. “RWAs have a duty to involve themselves in this process so that honest and not corrupt people enter the MCD”, he said.

Sharad Dixit who is coordinating the effort in Pandav Nagar in East Delhi said that the movement is picking up steam in almost all areas. Once people understand that this procedure is a methodology of enhancing the quality of candidates and ensuring that we have a say in his selection, they embrace the idea with full vigor”.

Dr. H.C. Gupta Federation Chief of Ashok Vihar areas said “It has to be admitted that the procedure drawn up for RWAs participation in municipal elections is flawless. If followed sincerely, it has the possibility of changing the quality of politics in the city”.

Sanjay Kaul, President, People's Action said “The important thing to understand is the procedure. Casual statements like “RWAs in politics” are not only incorrect but entirely off the mark This is a system of ensuring clean politics and good governance by involving the stakeholders in the most important democratic procedure of all – elections. And the response of RWAs across the city only goes to prove that people want a better system of governance”.

Press Statement:

Released on Friday, 9th Feb. 2007: 4.36 p.m.

The five points of serious concern in the Master Plan 2021: And three words to sum it all up: Cash, corruption and commercialization.**Private participation: Mera sapna Money, Money!**

The aspect of allowing private participation in building capacity is a highly dubious proposal in view of the fact that the real estate cartel will now have official access to prime property in India's capital city. Points to note are:

1. There exists no regulatory body in the real estate space and it is particularly prone to cartels, and large scale misuse of land
2. It is a highly productive black economy agent
3. Prices of property will spiral in accordance with 'operator' triggers and force out average residents from the city.
4. It will create a similar imbalance in the property market as in Gurgaon and Ghaziabad where multi-million rupee development has made the builders richer but the infrastructure is where it was.
5. What the Ministry has done by curtailing DDA's role and allowing private parties is replace wide spread horizontal corruption in the DDA with a vertical model that puts large amounts of black money within reach of a select few.

In-situ slum rehabilitation: *Making sure that nothing changes*

Although couched in socialistic double speak, this move establishes illegal behaviour as a norm on the one hand while doing the least bit for the communities that are living in awful conditions in clusters. The proposal to build multi-storeyed tenements for these people *in-situ* begs the question: why not resettle them in a more dignified manner elsewhere so that a better planned layout can be provided for their needs like crèches, schools, playgrounds for the children, community halls, drainage etc? To our suggestion of re- settlement, the argument of destabilisation was presented; but by trying to build where slums are already situated will also require slum dwellers to be moved for the duration of the construction – so then why not do the more logical thing – prepare a new settlement in a designated area prepared earlier. This would not only allow for a better settlement and a better life for them, it would also release government land *and* uphold the majesty of law.

Environment: *Lip service or just plain YAP, YAP.*

The Plan has paid lip service to the issue, with a banal statement emphasizing conservation of the Ridge. In the context of the developments happening on the Ridge in Vasant Kunj, the pronouncements are facile. The mention about Yamuna is highly dubious with a clear eye on blowing up mega bucks from international banks on the next phase of the YAP. Without accountability of the funds that were siphoned off in the last attempt at cleaning Yamuna, any new proposal will be suspect.

Unauthorised Colonies: *Illegal is legal, but the plan is un-implementable.*

To regularize illegal occupation of land on a scale such as the one agreed to by the Cabinet is a preposterous policy. It flies in the face of all legal living and makes a hero of the law breaker. But that

is not the only problem. To provide infrastructure etc *in-situ* would not be possible for the simple reason that these colonies are built in such a hap-hazard manner that they will not allow any delivery of services without breaking apart these colonies. The Ministry has merely passed the buck back on to the residents.

Mixed use: *From a shop among houses to a house among shops!*

The blanket approvals to mixed use are a contradictory application of a planning instrument that is most effectively used sparingly. It is one thing to allow a few shops in a residential area, but quite another to allow a few houses in a row of shops! Traders who may be celebrating this respite from sealings will soon realize that competition will come up all around their shop and force them off their business in the medium term. That the Master Plan has no suggestions on how the roads facing such land use zones will be widened is merely a market to the bankruptcy of ideas this document signifies. [The proposal to build multi-storeyed parking sites at 22 locations is too frivolous to deserve a reaction]

RWAs begin process for participation in municipal polls: Rohini first to create Ward Committee:

- *Congress and BJP Chief's statements on RWA nominations for municipal polls welcomed*

New Delhi, 31st January 2007: RWAs from Rohini's Sector 11, 16 and 17 have become the first to submit their ward Committee list to the Secretariat created specially to coordinate the RWAs intervention in municipal elections.

R.C. Kamboj coordinator of the United Residents Joint Action [URJA- Delhi's largest independent network of over 500 RWAs] for Rohini has today forwarded the list on behalf of the prospective ward to the Election Secretariat created by People's Action to facilitate the process. "We have identified the members of the Ward Committee on the basis of the main RWAs and their office bearers in the areas," said Kamboj. "We will create a two tier committee with one main Ward Committee and another support sub-committee to back up the main committee", he said. Consequently a 12 member Ward Committee is expected to be formed for this ward, whose final ward identification is pending the finalisation of the delimitation process.

Hectic parleys have begun in almost every zone of Delhi with RWAs making haste to form such Ward Committees and are actively looking forward to the next step of the process- the nomination procedure. "We are going to be initiating the nomination procedure as soon as RWAs form the Ward Committees and this entire process will work in relay depending on how soon Ward committees are formed in each area," said Pawan Jain, Executive Member, People's Action.

RWAs welcome statements of Party chiefs:

People's Action on behalf of over 500 RWAs of Delhi and many civil society organizations involved in fighting for good governance have comprehensively welcomed the reported statements of BJP and Congress Delhi state President's saying that they were open to suggestions of RWAs on candidates from their areas.

"This is a red-letter day for participatory politics and a big vindication for the movement for good governance," said Sanjay Kaul, President, People's Action on the development. "It also marks our first successful step in initiating grass roots electoral engagement among residents of every ward," he added.

RWAs expected to identify candidates in 70 wards for municipal elections.

Analysts have put the number of wards where RWAs could act as 'vote balancers' at close to 70. Ajay Jain, Executive member, People's Action has been following the trend closely and says, "Our estimation is that there are clear sectors where RWAs and their lobby of middle, lower or upper middle class voters can affect the outcome of polls. In CGHS dominated areas like Rohini, Dwarka and North Delhi, candidates identified by RWAs actually stand a good chance of winning. In most other wards, a substantial vote bank ranging from 1500 to 3000 votes makes RWAs a formidable influencer group."

Political groups are already mulling the fall out of such a shift in electoral politics but everyone remains skeptical on the ability of RWAs to induce voters to come out and vote.

Jain agrees, “ Everything rests on voter participation - and that is why we have created a two pronged strategy where one entire campaign is devoted to voter awareness and involvement in municipal polls”.

RWAs welcome SC orders on Centre's appeal. MPD 2021 comes under serious fire: Unrealistic, unimaginative, unfair, unbalanced, unimplementable, and created under the influence of petty politics, say Planners.

- *MPD 2021 expands the grip of corruption; The document is developed by interested parties, say planners, civil society groups*
- *RWAs want Expert Panel review under Court supervision.*

New Delhi, 28th January 2007: Eminent urban planner Kuldip Singh, speaking on behalf of his fraternity, today termed the entire exercise of the making of the MPD2021 a 'disaster' "It is by far one of the most unimaginative plans ever produced, even though it was created in a time when the most creative design could have been developed", said Singh

Listing out 15 straight anomalies within the MPD 2021, the planner said that nobody in his senses should allow this plan to pass. "It is a recipe for disaster for the city", Singh added. [List appended below]

Sanjay Kaul, President, People's Action was scathing in his attack on the Government terming the plan as the nervous design of a political draughtsman. "This entire document is a political plan created under the stress of an impending election. It has nothing to do with the needs of a city and its people," he said.

RWAs in the meantime have also raised the pitch for an immediate review of the plan by a group of accredited urban planners under the directions of the Supreme Court. "The situation is serious and if we allow this document to pass muster, we will never ever be able to reclaim this city for future generations," said Wing Commander J.S. Chadda of the East of Kailash Federation of RWAs. "Even the aspect of private partnership in housing has to be seen in the light of obvious suspicion: the hand of the real estate lobby is everywhere in this plan," he added.

Civil society groups have termed the master plan divisive, and detrimental to a harmonious city. "There is a distinct attempt to split the polity into portions for easier political management of interests. The calibration of colonies is arbitrary and unfair. To suggest that a lower middle class existence in this city should be synonymous with chaos and indiscrete commercialization is not only unfair, but legally untenable", said Alpana Kishore, Coordinator of the New Delhi People's Alliance [NDPA] a civil society collective that has over 30 organisations affiliated with it.

Serious long term deformities that planners say they find in the proposed plan are as follows:

1. The new proposed regulations have become more complicated than the earlier regulations, thereby leading to more corruption, since the role of inspectors has also been reasonably enhanced.
2. There is no graphic demarcation with maps etc. which may clarify how the building regulations are to be implemented on the ground.

3. Different parts of the city require varying development controls based on the character of each area. Subdivision of the city based on categories A-E etc. originally demarcated for purposes of tax collection, is irrational for purpose of deriving development control norms suitable for given area. Methodology of preparation of Master Plan needs reorientation. Detailed Plans for development of each area need to be knitted together to form the base of the Master Plan. A ground-up exercise is necessary.
4. No attempt has been made to integrate the MRTS project into the Master Plan. In the next ten years all the arterial roads of Delhi will be defaced with elevated rail tracks.
5. It does not have adequate safeguards/proposals for the preservation of Delhi's natural assets viz. the river and the ridge. The remarks on the river Yamuna are most disturbing. DDA plans to exploit the flood plain for urban development which has to be stopped.
6. DDA/MCD have suddenly acquired a financial stake in the regularization of irregularities. System of annual charges is tailor made to harass the public and extort money.
7. The Master Plan's formulation in respect of the population growth is out of context. If Delhi could not provide adequate infrastructure for a population 13.2 million in the last 45 years, then how is the required infrastructure to be augmented for an additional population of 100 million in the next 15 years.
8. Density standards have been drastically lowered. How are the Poor standards to survive in the given density of 600 units/Hct or say 2700 person/Hct.
9. Land on periphery of Delhi is proposed to be urbanized to touch the administrative boundaries of Delhi. Urbanization across the boundary will be beyond Delhi's control. This is tailor made for uncontrolled urbanization across the border.
10. Migration has been assumed to increase in the coming decade. No measure to check migration.
11. Mixed Land uses in present form impossible to implement. Most harmful and discriminatory. Why should lower category colonies alone suffer the burdens of rampant commercialization.
12. Environment issues and sustainability of the city's infrastructure have no place in the MPD 2021.
13. Water requirements impossible to be provided.
14. No scheme for transit population. City will continue to grow by accretion of unauthorized colonies.
15. Total commercial land use not assessed. Except for A + B colonies, practically the whole city can be commercialized. This is Unprecedented/Irrational in the annals of city planning.
16. Three major consequences are inevitable :
 - i) Environmental degradation .
 - ii) Friction between neighbours.
 - iii) Inspector Raj leading to enhanced corruption.

Delhi RWAs decide to put up candidates for municipal polls: agree on procedure

- Ward Committees to be created to evaluate candidates
- “Primaries” will decide candidate.
- First option for adoption of such candidates will be given to political parties
- Residents advised to be wary of politically aligned RWAs

New Delhi, 23rd January 2007: RWAs from across the city in a packed to capacity India International Center Auditorium today passed a resolution confirming participation of RWAs in the municipal polls due soon in the city of Delhi.

RWAs voted with consensus to challenge existing political parties by selecting ‘clean’ and ‘effective’ candidates from their own areas to stand for elections. However, in a twist designed to maximize their chances of winning and to be impartial, RWAs have been given a format where such candidates once selected will be offered for ‘adoption’ to the main political parties and only if the parties do not agree to field such consensus candidates will the candidate fight as an independent, with the backing of all civil society groups starting with the local residents.

Outlining the procedure, People’s Action President Sanjay Kaul said that the RWAs will first have to create Ward Committees of 11 members made up of RWAs from within each ward. Thereafter a selection process that will involve evaluation by the ward committee and an expert panel from the New Delhi people’s Alliance [NDPA] will end with a public meeting where prospective candidates will have to face-off at a “Primary Election’ to select a consensus candidate by secret ballot.

The candidate so selected will be offered to main political parties to field as the local favourite but if they do not agree to do so the candidate will be backed by various civil society groups to stand as independent.

“Our fundamental idea is to induce better candidature - if we can change the mindset of existing parties and they agree to adopt candidates selected by the Ward Committees, so much the better. If not, RWAs will have to pose a challenge for them in each ward,” said Kaul.

Kaul also warned RWAs that they must not put up candidates without forming Ward Committees or following the laid out procedure as such candidates would always be susceptible to pressures and pulls from political groups. “They will also have no credibility in the eyes of the residents”, he said.

Reminding people that there would be two kinds of opposition to this idea, Kaul said, “One section that will speak against this idea will be RWAs who are aligned with political parties or politicians. They would not want their party vote banks to be challenged. The other section will insist in fielding candidates without following the procedure - they will be acting on behalf of political parties who want to cut votes to benefit their candidates. RWAs must guard against such motivated or vested groups,” advised Kaul.

Other speakers included URJA Coordinators from all zones of Delhi, Mr Pawan Jain, Executive Member of People's Action and Ms Meera Mitra of the New Delhi People's Alliance [NDPA] apart from a host of RWA members who put forth their opinions and views on the issue.

Political Convention of RWAs on 23rd January: RWAs, NGOs, Market Associations and Trade organizations in crucial meet on participation in municipal elections.

New Delhi, 21st January 2007: Bringing to end the speculation of whether RWAs would actively participate in municipal elections and the procedure of how candidate selection will be done in consultation between political parties and RWAs, People's Action has convened a Political Convention of RWAs on the 23rd January at the India International Centre, to make the proposal public.

Keeping a lid still on the methodology to be adopted for participation by RWAs, the group has involved all prominent sections and organised bodies like the Market Associations, the Trade unions and bodies, NGOs, bureaucrats and activists who have been working on issues of good governance and electoral and municipal reforms.

“The idea is simply to activate the middle class to assert themselves and demand a say in policy. To do so we need to reorganise ourselves and the Political Convention of the 23rd January will lay out the model that we have developed in consultation with all groups actively pursuing the same end”, said Sanjay Kaul, President of People's Action.

Coordinators of the United Residents Joint Action [URJA - the RWA network of over 500 RWAs across Delhi] have been busy preparing RWAs from their respective zones for the event with information and advance discussions on the subject. “We have been working with different RWAs in our areas over the last two months, taking feedback and developing possible models for the proposed mechanism for electoral intervention,” said Atul Goyal, URJA Coordinator for West and central zones.

Members of trade bodies and NGOs that are part of the New Delhi People's Alliance [NDPA – an alliance of over 30 organisations of Delhi] will also participate in the event.

“Whether trader or activist, we are all residents and as such members of some RWA or the other. This Political Convention of 23rd January is an overarching meet of concerned citizens thinking about their city and how to improve it,” said Roshan Seth, eminent actor and activist who is also slated to participate in the event.

Civil society welcomes Congress decision to shun ‘tainted’ candidates: RWA consultation will ensure better accountability, says NDPA.

New Delhi, 17th January 2007: Close on the heels of a recent meeting organized under the aegis of the New Delhi People’s Alliance [NDPA], a powerful federation of over 30 groups active in Delhi, between civil society groups, RWAs and political parties to argue for better candidature in the coming municipal elections, today’s reported statements of Congress leaders that ‘tainted’ candidates will be shunned has brought great cheer to member organizations of the group.

“This is a wonderful fall-out of the meeting we had arranged and we welcome and encourage all political parties to come up with similar statements of intent for the coming and future elections”, said Alpana Kishore, coordinator of NDPA.

The meeting held on 9th of January was attended by BJP and Congress brass and both parties had welcomed the essential premise of promoting greater consultations between RWAs and parties before deciding candidature.

“We are particularly encouraged that a party has taken the lead in making a commitment of this nature. We will now press for a written declaration of such a stand from all parties and candidates, said Madhu Kishwar of Manushi and a member of the NDPA.

Atul Goyal, representing United Residents Joint Action, [URJA] a network of over 500 RWAs all across Delhi, who was a part of the meeting said that this was one of the biggest achievement of the movement for good governance. “We consider this a very important achievement of our collective efforts as a group that is working to empower RWAs across the city state of Delhi”.

Sanjay Kaul, President of People’s Action, the group that put together the meeting, said that the idea of pre-candidature consultations between parties and RWAs was a critical component in enabling good candidates to emerge while blocking the options for corrupt ones. “We intend to propose this model of pre-election consultations for candidature for all future elections in the state”.

Kaul also said that the quick turnaround by the Congress was an indicator of the active lobbying of well intentioned MLAs in the party and suggested that parties have to realize that civil society has the power to defeat candidates in the polls.

Joginder Singh joins call for RWA involvement in candidate selection in municipal elections : civil society groups prepare a draft for consultations with political parties.

New Delhi, 17th January, 2007: Following up on the proposal by a group of Delhi-based NGOs, RWA and trade groups under the aegis of New Delhi People's Alliance [NDPA] for consultations between political parties and them for selection of candidates for municipal elections, Former CBI Director, Joginder Singh today sought to put his views in support of the proposal.

In his statement in support of the proposal, Mr. Singh said, “ The notion that a candidate is representing a constituency of residents is contradicted by existing processes of candidate selection by political parties. If the candidate intends to stand to represent a section of residents, he or she must have the tacit approval of that body. To that extent this proposal for consultations between parties and the people is a positive step in inducing the right quality of candidature into governing bodies and must be supported by every right thinking person”.

Members of NDPA are developing a draft structure for a process of consultations for discussions with political parties. This draft will have various aspects built into the model to weed out candidates with criminal backgrounds or those with dubious pasts. In addition, we are preparing a charter that we will expect each prospective candidate to follow as a best practice methodology, said Madhu Kishwar of Manushi, a member of the NDPA.

Sanjay Kaul, President of People's Action, the advocacy group that has worked closely with the New Delhi People's Alliance [NDPA] to moot this proposal and had convened a joint meeting with the leadership of political parties to discuss this proposal said that the views expressed by Mr. Joginder Singh ring true for any resident of Delhi. “ The only way governance will improve is if the quality of candidature improves. This proposal will have far reaching impact on future elections if put into practice”, said Kaul.

The final model for consultations on candidate selection will be made public at a specially convened meeting of RWAs next week.

RWAs demand greater say in candidate selection in elections : proposal for consultation on candidature with political parties to be prepared by 18th Jan.

New Delhi, 14th January 2007: Following the successful meeting with political brass from the main parties in the capital, Resident Welfare Associations [RWAs] in the capital are preparing a procedure through which RWAs could be involved by political groups in candidate selection within wards. The proposal was mooted recently at a meeting organized by advocacy group People's Action, along with members of an influential grouping of NGOs and trade unions etc under the aegis of New Delhi People's Alliance [NDPA], and was quickly accepted by most members of political parties as worthy of consideration.

Sanjay Kaul, President of People's Action said, "Members of NDPA will present a draft plan for a process that could be followed in each ward which would not only ensure that only 'clean' candidates get tickets but also raise the bar on the quality of candidature".

RWAs have for long been ignored in this process simply because of the existing system of internal ticket distributions in parties which has no democratic basis, said group members of People's Action who have worked extensively on various aspects of electoral reforms

People's Action had first put this proposal in practice during the assembly elections in Haryana for the Gurgaon constituency where prospective candidates had to get 'clean chits' from as many as twenty RWAs within their area to be considered by the community for candidature. Thereafter, a primary election was undertaken where the entire RWA body chose a consensus candidate from three claimants in a transparent, secret ballot election.

"We have appealed to the Election Commission earlier to institutionalize this procedure as a methodology to ensure internal democracy within parties. This would also do away with the spectre of 'paying' for tickets and many corrupt practices that exist today due to the absence of any rational basis of ticket distribution", added Kaul.

"The proposal for greater engagement between RWAs and political parties in deciding candidature is expected to be ready by the 18th January, when it will be shared with political party bosses for their inputs and then will be made public at a specially convened Convention of RWAs and other civil society groups of Delhi before the end of the month," said Alpana Kishore, coordinator of the NDPA.

Madhu Kishwar, Editor of Manushi and a member of the NDPA and who is readying a special charter that will be part of the proposal said, " This engagement is the start of a very critical process that has so far been missing from almost every election we have seen. This will not only lead to cleaner politics, but also greater participation of the middle class in municipal elections".

Political party members willing to involve RWAs in candidate selection: Gurgaon model could be used to develop model for consultations.

New Delhi, 9th January 2007: NGOs, RWAs under the banner of United Residents Joint Action [URJA], trade unions and other activists of the city today met political party brass under the aegis of New Delhi People's Alliance [NDPA] in an attempt to promote greater engagement between parties and RWAs on the issue of candidature in the coming municipal elections.

Speaking in the key note address, Sanjay Kaul, President of People's Action, which had organized this meeting said, "How can it be that the person who will represent me for the next five years is introduced to me just 13 days before election? To be my representative, he or she must be known to me, their qualities, track record, experience must be known to me - but the current system of deciding candidates is far short of democratic norms".

Responding to the debate, Dr. Harshvardhan of the BJP started by laying out the limitations of the electoral process where even political parties do not know which seats are designated as reserved until literally the last day. He also referred to the process thereafter of seeking candidates based on their loyalty to political ideology, personal qualities and winnability as the three steps to candidate selection.

Dr. S.C. Vats of the Congress admitted that electoral reform would only be possible with greater transparency and welcomed the proposal saying that he would strongly take it up within his party to moot the suggestion of greater consultation with RWAs. "I am a believer in the power of intrinsic value and I applaud the effort of your group to bring greater transparency to the system", he said.

Vijay Jolly, MLA BJP from Saket pointed out to the internal difficulties of middle class apathy to elections as the biggest impediment to their involvement in the process. "Unless this class of residents step out to exercise their franchise, their influence will remain limited to drawing room discussions. However, I fully support the proposal for greater engagement with RWAs at the local level in the case of deciding candidature".

Arti Mehra, Councillor from Gulmohar Park ward said that there are impediments in a proposal such as this for the reason that there were not a cohesive group of RWAs and that the levels of RWA influence varies from area to area.

RWAs present at the meeting protested the attempts to influence or politicize RWAs by political parties. Mr. P.K. Roy, representing URJA said that naked attempts to influence RWAs was seen in the CR Park areas. Mr. S.P. Gupta of Old Rajendra Nagar also seconded the view.

Madhu Kishwar of Manushi, speaking on behalf of NDPA asked the panelists what steps they could take to institutionalize such a structure that would ensure greater participation of civil society groups in candidate selection. This view was also supported by Sunita Thakur of Janadesh and Alpana Kishore of People's Action. The political party representatives on their part said that they would be open to any suggestions on such a system if the NDPA could develop such a structure. Dr. Harshvardhan also reiterated that his party would immediately consider any propositions offered by the group to enhance middle class interest and engagement in the coming municipal polls, subject to time permitting in view of the delimitation that would effectively double the number of municipal wards in the city."

NDPA members will now prepare a format borrowing on the Gurgaon experiment where People's Action involved local RWAs to develop a unique system of candidate selection using the American system of 'Primaries' – internal elections to select a candidate. A charter of candidate 'must-haves' will also be developed to guide RWAs in making their recommendations.

People's Action will now call an All-Delhi RWA convention to vote on these proposals. The meeting was attended by members of NDPA, a consortium of over 30 organisations involving RWAs, NGOs, Trade unions, activists and 40 select members of URJA from all across Delhi.

