

Press Release

People's Action forms URJA Senate: establishes organizational framework for RWA movement: 10-Member body will develop Committees within political geographies: Committees to work as pressure groups within each constituency and ward.

New Delhi, 11th November, 2008: In a far reaching move, People's Action has today formalized a 10-member Senate Committee for the United Residents Joint Action [URJA], Delhi's apex Resident Welfare Association body, with a view to establishing a structure and organization to the movement for good governance.

The 10-member Senate is constituted of well known community leaders from different areas of Delhi – one each from each zone of Delhi and three members from People's Action. The Committee has named Wing Commander J.S. Chadda from South Delhi, Dr. H.C. Gupta from North Delhi, Shri Atul Goyal from Central Delhi, Mr Varinder Arora from East Delhi, Mr. Naresh Ummat from West Delhi, Mr R.C. Kamboj from Rohini and Mr. Sushil Kumar from Dwarka. People's Action representatives on this panel will include Ms. Sonali Agrawal, Ms. Nimmi Rastogi and Mr. Ajay Jain.

The first function of the Senate Committee will be to establish URJA Committees within all Municipal Wards of Delhi and aim to federating all RWAs within the ward under one umbrella body. Similar actions will be required of the Committees to create Assembly and Lok Sabha level committees in the future. The overall aim of our efforts is to create a new leadership at every level within the city that works like an opposing force to government to extract maximum performance from it.

“This process is a culmination of the efforts of all RWAs who have wholeheartedly participated in our programme for organization building over the last four months,” said Sanjay Kaul, President People's Action.

“URJA is a watch dog for public interest and by creating the URJA Senate we aim to see this work expand and grow into a professional body that operates in an independent and cohesive manner. URJA will be an autonomous entity, which will work by consensus and common cause.”

“It is my estimation that URJA will go on to become a powerful civil society movement and usher in an era of greater political accountability and administrative efficiency using people power and the principle of collective action”, said Kaul.

For more details, please contact Atul Goyal on 9868148896 or J.S Chadda on 9312626900

Press Invite

URJA Convention of RWAs raises security concerns: mandatory ID cards only way to fight terror, concludes assembly.

- Joginder Singh comes down heavily on apathy to security:

New Delhi, 27th Sept., 2008: The URJA Convention of Delhi RWAs threw up a strong demand for stringent and concrete steps to fight terror. Close to 500 members from RWAs across Delhi acknowledged the need for a mandatory ID card regime as was evidenced from the loudest cheers for Joginder Singh, Former CBI Director when he made the point.

People's Action has been strongly advocating the need for such a regime to not only combat terror but also give a respectful identity to migrants and innocent people who are picked by investigating agencies for lack of such an identity proof.

The security issue was highlighted even as the Mehrauli blasts occurred almost as the Convention was reconvening after lunch just prior to Joginder Singh's scheduled talk.

The URJA Convention also threw up a strong demand for the concept of the Resident Ward Committee [RWC], another progressive step advocated by People's Action to bring transparency, accountability and efficiency to civic works within wards.

Chairman of the standing committee of the MCD, Vijender Gupta bore the brunt of the demand for the RWC after Mayor Arti Mehra left the venue, and a show of hands called showed a 100% support for the concept among residents. Dr. H. C. Gupta of Ashok Vihar Federation of RWAs and Mr. R.C. Kamboj of Rohini Federation also proposed the demand vociferously.

In other sidelights of the Convention, Jagdish Mukhi made an open offer on behalf of the BJP to residents to contribute to the BJP manifesto by proposing suggestions, while Mr. J.P. Agarwal left early due to a pending appointment. Other topics covered at the venue was the introduction of zonal coordinators of URJA, talks by Manoj Mishra on the Yamuna, Vinod Jain on the power front, Anil Mittal on the co-operative societies situation in Delhi and Mr Udayan Namboodiri on the issue of plastic bags usage in Delhi.

Members also participated in a fruitful session with the Chief Information Commissioner Mr. Wajahat Habibullah's interactive session.

For more information, please call 9811014089

Press Release

Delhi Police statements irresponsible and infantile: It's not the cycles, its ID card that is the problem, says People's Action.

New Delhi, 2nd August, 2008: Reacting sharply to reports of the Delhi Police new diktat asking cycle sellers to insist on ID from buyers, People's Action has dismissed the idea as childish and a knee jerk reaction, emphasizing that it is not cycles, but the lack of a compulsory ID regime that is the cause of terrorist and criminal acts.

People's Action has said that in the present circumstances, this move will be seen only as an attempt to harass the largest population of the poor in Delhi and will face opposition from political fronts. "How will the man produce an ID if he doesn't have one," asked Sonali Agrawal, a member of the group.

"Delhi Police is neither competent to issue such orders nor in a position to enforce it, then why make irresponsible statements," asked. Major Rohit Sethi, a People's Action associate member from URJA [United Residents Joint Action] West Patel Nagar.

"Remember that your enemy is not stupid. If procuring cycles becomes a problem, they will procure cycle rickshaws and then motorcycles and so on...why must we go through this process of potential danger when we can address the entire problem in one go, by imposing the compulsory Identity card regime", asked Varinder Arora of URJA East Delhi, the RWA Wing of People's Action.

"Instead of this ridiculous ad-hoc reaction, if the Police set-up were to advance support for the compulsory ID regime, we might solve the largest portion of the problem," said Sushil Kumar of the Dwarka RWA.

People's Action has argued that persons least expected of committing such crimes and who were generally lawful residents of the city were required to maintain multiple Identity Cards, whereas persons *most likely* to commit such crimes – a floating migrant and illegal immigrant population - were not required to carry one.

"The misconception that we can have security without mandatory Identity cards is nonsense," said Sanjay Kaul, President People's Action "and anyone opposing this idea is either unclear of the idea, unsound of mind, or plainly anti-national" he added.

For more information, please contact 9811014089

Press Release

People's Action demands Compulsory IDs for Delhi residents: No other method to root out security lapses or reduce terrorist activity, say RWAs.

New Delhi, 28th July, 2008: Close on the heels of the blasts in Bangalore and Ahmedabad, People's Action has confirmed that most RWAs in Delhi are in favour of the compulsory ID regime that has so often been discussed, even mentioned by the LG recently but put on the backburner due to political parties opposing it.

“It is a simple equation: if you don't know who stays in your city and have no record of the same, you are setting the stage for a disaster sooner or later. Terrorists like it this way. Problem is, some of our politicians also like it this way,” said Sanjay Kaul, President People's Action, in a sharply worded response at a meeting of RWAs yesterday organized by URJA [United RWAs Joint Action].

The group has argued that a person *least* susceptible to commit such a crime is identified and has *not one, but multiple* ID's in the shape of a PAN number, a driving license, credit card, property papers etc but the very people who are most likely to commit such a crime are not expected to be carrying an ID hinting at the vast number of migrants that come in and go out of the city daily without check.

People's Action had petitioned for a Work Permit regime for such migrant or contracted labour arguing that bona fide labourers would get their due as respected citizens of the state if they carried an ID as against the harassment they have to undergo currently because of the precise lack of it.

“Politicians who say that this would lead to ‘profiling’ are trying to rouse emotions on an issue that demands rational behaviour,” Vivek Garg of Shakti Nagar RWA, supporting the idea.

Residents scoffed at Police barricades that come out studiously after there has been a blast in some part of the country and then forgotten after a few days. “The Police regime is operating in knee-jerk fashion,” says Gulshan Rai of Janakpuri RWA. “They are waiting for a crime to be committed instead of focusing on preventing it”, he said adding that crime in the city was making senior citizens more and more susceptible each passing day.

The group said that the principle behind the ID card proposal was the same as servant verification or tenant verification. “If we do not identify, we do not apprehend, that is the international principle of policing”, said Kaul.

V.K Arora of URJA added that we have to remember that this Government has not been able to identify or convict a single person for the Sarojini Nagar blasts till today.

Press Release

People's Action proposes 3 steps to reduce crime by household helps:

1. Mandatory registration of household helps through legislation;
2. Revision of the LG's ID card proposal; and
3. Work Permit regime to identify foreign nationals.

New Delhi, 9th June, 2008: People's Action has today reiterated that unless there is a mandatory requirement under law to register household service providers, [Verification is for the Police to do: Residents need only Register their employees] the problem of illegal migrants committing grave offences will not wane. The group issued the following statement:

“We strongly propose that the entire servant verification regime is a failure and needs to be re-evaluated. Our proposition is that the process must be halved into two distinct portions, one where the onus must lie on the citizen to Register his or her household service provider, and the other where the Police and the law enforcement agency will verify the antecedents of such registrants. It is our belief that the act of registration will not occur unless made legally binding and we urge the Government to immediately make preparations for enabling such legislation.

To make the system more robust and allow for sharing of responsibility between employer and employee, we also propose that the onus of securing an ID should be on the job seeker. To this end we also propose introducing the “Work Permit” regime prevalent in almost every country with a robust security mechanism in place – nobody should be employed unless he or she carries a Work Permit. The reason we propose the Work Permit over and above the IDs is to cancel out the possibility of fake IDs which are easily procurable under the current regime.

The Permit can be made available by following a similar procedure as used for the servant verification currently in operation. To obviate the chances of corruption and harassment for genuine workers, and also to not weigh down the Police force with more work, it is recommended that the Labour Department be made responsible for this function under which it will license a qualified number of NGOs, Security Agencies, Servant Placement agencies to issue such cards.

To make the system foolproof, we also recommend that the proposal mooted by the LG to issue biometric ID cards to every citizen of the state be revived. It is plainly ridiculous that every bona fide resident of the city is identified in multiple places – at banks, in the IT department, in Municipalities and in employee rolls, but the migrant, illegal or legal needs no such identification.

It is our estimation that in following all the three points listed above concurrently, the Government will not only underline the mandate it has to protect and provide a better quality of life for bona fide workers in the city it will also immediately identify foreign illegal migrants for deportation.”

For more details, please contact 9811014089

Press Release

AC Bus project may end up like the BRT fiasco: serious deficiencies in proposed induction methodology, says People's Action.

- Govt. is putting the cart before the horse - choosing showy concepts rather than sensible investments in transport 'backbone'
- Expenditure may go in vain without interconnectivity with Metro
- Seamless inter-connectivity within a multi-modal system still a distant dream – expensive and fancy ideas are taking precedence over simple logic.

New Delhi, 6th June, 2008: People's Action has today expressed disappointment at the ad-hoc manner in which Air Conditioned [A/C] Buses have been inducted into the DTC fleet without a serious analysis, arguing that the city's primary need is an inter-woven multi modal transportation model that first enhances basic transportation and then dovetails with existing systems such as the Metro to derive maximum ridership.

“Instead we find a number of knee-jerk, and ad-hoc concepts being floated at the same time,” said Sanjay Kaul, President, People's Action suggesting that new AC bus induction may also end up like the BRT fiasco. “Traffic is going to be the biggest challenge before Delhi in the years to come. In view of the fuel crisis, it will also be imperative that we do not over expend or waste precious resources in ordering more vehicles when the available resources have not been optimized, but unfortunately that is what seems to be happening under the current regime”, he added.

People's Action has earlier argued that instead of importing new and untested western concepts like BRT, it would have made eminent sense to increase the bus coverage of residential areas and link them with metro stations so that upwardly mobile residents were inspired to use the Metro. “The fundamental premise of transferring more people to public transport cannot be served until seamless inter connectivity is available to private vehicle users. So whereas, we have strongly supported the use of A/C buses in our proposals, we do not see them being effective until the bus coverage connects the up-market customers' primary and terminal areas first,” said Kaul.

Group members have lamented the hasty and ill-conceived momentum to import almost every available idea in the marketplace if it sounds good and has the outward look of a 'modern' concept. “Our concern remains that election mania cannot be allowed to become the yardstick of transport planning for a city. This raving tendency to spend, spend and spend quickly while the going is good, is bad both as principle and as policy, said a said Wing Commander J. S Chadda, a group member asking for a serious rethink of the state's transport planning.

For more information, please contact 9811014089

Press Release

RWAs protest Property Tax confusion in spite of MCD clarifications: assurances have been in vain, most counters are not accepting forms manually, say residents. Arya says new forms will be issued

- Property Tax issue tops agenda at URJA Zonal committees meetings in North Delhi, West Delhi and Rohini.
- URJA representatives meet Leader of the House
- RWAs also demand formalisation of Resident Ward Committees

New Delhi, 28th May, 2008: Zonal Meetings of URJA [United RWAs Joint Action] at three locations across Delhi over the weekend returned the same verdict: residents are in the dark on the property tax issue in spite of the assurances held out by the Leader of the House and the Mayor.

“Irrespective of the declarations of Mr. Subhash Arya and his colleagues in the MCD, the issue of property tax filing is not resolved” said Dr H.C. Gupta of Ashok Vihar who had to manage almost 40 RWA heads at the RWA federation meeting on Sunday.

URJA members were told by RWAs in the other two zonal committee level meetings in Rohini and Naraina Vihar that the assurances of the MCD top brass were not being followed in full by DC offices in many cases and which was complicating the matter. In other related matters the rebates mentioned were also held up for lack of clarity at the official level.

It may be recalled that the MCD top brass had been cautioned about the impending harassment residents would face if the property tax issue was not allowed to stay *status quo* and the leader of the House had convened a press conference allaying all fears about withdrawal of rebates and collection processes last week.

“However, we were getting feedback that in spite of the efforts of the MCD the local offices are not cooperating or there are systemic hassles and these had to be addressed” said Atul Goyal, URJA Central Zone coordinator. “In addition, we are also attempting an intermediate step to reduce the harassment for residents by starting a bulk collection camps at the RWA level itself,” said Goyal.

Today, a delegation of URJA zonal heads met the leader of the House Mr. Subhash Arya to seek immediate redressal of residents’ complaints. The delegation comprised of Mr R.C. Kamboj and Mr Sharma of Rohini Zone; Mr. Chikkara and Mr Tejawani from the North Zone; Mr Gulshan Rai from West Zone and Mr Atul Goyal from Central Zone.

We have been assured by Mr. Arya that a new form will be released that would do away with the complications being faced by residents, said Goyal after emerging from the hour-long meeting at Town Hall. Members of the delegation felt that that would be the best option under the circumstances as the current forms were not in line with the computer software being used at MCD offices.

The delegation also stressed the need to formalize the Resident Ward Committee formation that the group has been lobbying for over a year now. The Mayor has promised to discuss the issue in the middle of June.

Press Release

RWAs grill MCD top brass on Property Tax confusion : Leader of the House, Subhash Arya clarifies on 9-point representation .

- Status Quo to prevail, residents can file according to old tariff structure
- RWAs call collect and file jointly for colonies

New Delhi, 13th May, 2008: Representatives from Delhi's largest independent RWA body, the United RWAs Joint Action [URJA] today secured a meeting with the Leader of the House, Subhash Arya on a host of doubts that had accumulated ever since new norms for property tax filing were floated. The meeting was held at Town Hall at 1 p.m. and a 9-point representation was drawn up for clarifications.

“Our RWA members had warned that the state of confusion could not be allowed to continue and wanted clarifications on the proposed regime on property tax”, said Atul Goyal of Karol Bagh RWA and Central Coordinator for URJA

“RWAs are angry at the proposed changes and are not willing to accept the new proposals,” said R.C. Kamboj of the Rohini Federation of RWAs. R.L. Dua of Rajendra Nagar RWA said that a protest meeting at Rajendra Nagar had been planned in advance if the new changes were not withdrawn.

In the meeting held with Mr. Subhash Arya the following clarifications were offered by the leader of the House on each point asked by URJA Representatives:

1. **Filing of Tax returns at Cyber Cafes only** – Mr. Arya confirmed that both modes would be allowed viz. manual receipts as well as deposition at Cybercafes
2. **Why force consumer/residents to pay extra 2.4% service charges at cybercafe's** – Mr. Arya has said the decision on this was pending but in the meantime manual receipts will be acceptable.
3. **Increase of Senior Citizen age limit from 60 to 65** – Mr Arya clarified that the limit shall remain 60 and has asked respondents to calculate their filing with that as basis
4. **Rebate to senior citizen up to 200 sq mtrs.-** Mr. Arya confirmed that this was to continue as before.
5. **Rebate in case of joint ownership where one is a senior citizen** – Mr Arya clarified that this would also remain same as earlier
6. **In case of rented Property the multiple factor earlier was 2 (Two) but now proposed as 4 (Four)-** Mr. Arya clarified that it shall remain 2 (Two) only, as earlier
7. **If MCD has proposed changes in the budget as stated by opposition members in media erroneously - the same is to be tackled by Mayor under rule 177 to amend and notify. What is the factual position?** – Mr. Arya clarified that the matter is to be settled on 19th May when the house meets. He added “If we cannot withdraw the changes, we will announce advance rebates to neutralize any burden on residents and property tax filers”.
8. **The last date of filing return and seek 15% discount should be extended to 31 July 2008 under the circumstances -** Mr Arya said that no extension was planned, since a good two months are available for the exercise.
9. **The above noted points or any other if left out shall be clarified by MCD in all leading News papers of the city with immediate effect.** Mr Arya confirmed that they were in the process of doing so and were also meeting the LG for the other technical issues.

Over all, Mr. Arya has said that although new forms have been printed and distributed, Residents should ignore the text of the new forms and go ahead and file according to the old structure.

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In another important clarification URJA members secured a confirmation that RWAs can collect the property tax forms from residents in their colony and prepare a list of such assesses in duplicate and deposit it with the concerned House Tax department. A receipt will be issued and given to the RWA for the same.

URJA Zonal Coordinators from Central, East and North Delhi and Rohini attended the meeting. The members of the delegation were:

- Mr. R.L. Dua of Rajendra Nagar RWA for URJA Central Delhi :
- Mr. R.K. Khanna from Pitampura for URJA North.Delhi;
- Mr. V.N. Bali form Ram Vihar for URJA East Delhi
- Mr. R.C. Kamboj of Rohni RWA Federation for URJA Rohini and two others.

For more information, please contact Atul Goyal on 9868148896

Press Release

Delhi learnt nothing from Pune BRT: same story, same situation, same people behind the mess.

- Citizens vent ire over bad planning, poor implementation:

New Delhi, 27th April, 2008: It's not just Delhi, Pune has the dubious distinction of being the country's first city to start a BRT service and not surprisingly, it had a similar genesis and fallout to the one in Delhi, presumably also because it has the same project proponents- the IIT based TRIPP that is now credited with the mess in Delhi.

Pune inaugurated its BRT System on 3 December 2006 and almost a year and a half later citizens in Pune who had all along welcomed the project are now categorical that too many flaws have marred the project to the point of disuse and despair. [www.indiatogether.org/2007/jan/eco-brtpune.htm]

Members on Praja a local Bangalore Blog who are feverishly discussing the BRT as it is poised to be introduced in the software capital of the Country, have pointed out a number of distinctive mistakes in the Pune model, which show a marked resemblance to the very errors that has Delhiites reeling under the onslaught of traffic jams and chaos, proving that nothing at all was learnt from the experience before implementing it in Delhi. [ASJ in <http://bangalore.praja.in/discuss/2008/01/brts-right-all-cities>]

The Pune Traffic and Transportation Forum [PTTF] a citizens group which initiate the debate on the BRT by inviting Enrique Penalosa, the celebrated Mayor of Bogota for a presentation on the system as a means of promoting better public transportation in Pune are circumspect themselves after the launch, signaling their discomfiture with a blog on their website titled " Are we rushing the BRT in Pune" [www.pttf.net]

Sujit Patwardhan of the PTTF is on record, literally a day after the inauguration of the Pune BRT in a message to SUSTRAN, [an international discussion forum devoted to issues of sustainable transport with a focus on developing countries] pointing out the convoluted and politically motivated forward movement on the project: "Pune becomes the first city in India to start BRT, on what still is an incomplete Pilot corridor of about 12.5 Kilometers. As enthusiastic supporters of BRT in Pune we have also been concerned about the hasty way in which projects get implemented without proper attention to detail. Yesterday's inauguration at the hands of the Union Urban Development Minister Mr Jaipal Reddy was also an example of this - largely a political affair with the ruling Congress Party rushing to get the project off the ground in time to beat the political deadline set by the oncoming elections to the Local Civic body." In another paragraph he openly credits "Dr Geetam Tiwari and Dr Dinesh Mohan from IIT (Indian Institute of Technology), New Delhi, have played a key role in designing the Pilot project." [Sujit Patwardhan : sujit@vnl.com, sujitp@gmail.com]

Rahul Pawar, an associate of People's Action in Pune who is a member of a local citizen's group 'Better Roads for Pune' has today confirmed the worst fears of the South Delhi residents. "It is

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the same situation here in Pune. Interminable jams, chaotic traffic, total confusion, mixed traffic in BRT lanes and general mayhem,” he said to Sonali Agrawal, People’s Action member in Delhi on telephone today.

In the meantime, resident groups in Delhi are now gearing up to hold local representatives responsible if the project goes ahead and preparing to petition them against the project.

Reference 1:

Urban development secretary M Ramachandran confirmed the development and said that the Centre had written to eight cities to send a review report in two months. “We have received some complaints from [Pune](#) that there were more accidents after BRTS was introduced in the city. Now, the city authority is going for a revised DPR (detailed project report) so that there could be re-designs wherever necessary. We want other cities also to prepare review reports and spot possible shortcomings. We expect the review process to be completed in two months,” the secretary said. Significantly, BRTS in New Delhi does not come under the purview of urban development ministry as it has been funded by [Delhi](#) government and local bodies. [Shantanu Nandan Sharma in The Economic Times 27 Apr, 2008]

Reference 2:

The experience in Pune, where one BRT corridor was opened in January, has also been dismal. Transport experts say the corridor has been poorly planned and traffic and pedestrians encroach on the tracks reserved for buses. This slows the system and causes jams. [Nitya Jacob in LiveMint.com on 27 March 2007]

For more information, please contact 9811014089

Press Release

South Delhi looks like ISBT, say residents. Heads of the two largest RWA federations along the BRT route warn of growing resentment.

- RWAs to start petitioning MLAs for removal of tracks.

New Delhi, 26th April: Heads of the two largest RWA federations along the BRT route have warned of growing resentment against the BRT corridor saying it was being presented as *fait accompli* to residents who were never consulted on the project. “We were made to believe that something wonderful would happen once this stretch opens. Something dreadful has happened since. The side alleys and internal routes in GK-I are clogged with traffic”, said **Ashok Sethi, President, GKRA** the federation of Greater Kailash RWAs.

P.K. Roy, President, EPDP Association, the apex RWA federation of Chittaranjan Park said residents are livid at the project. “Life has become hell for most people in our colonies ever since this thing has gone on trial”, he said adding that they were feeling victimized and tortured.

Residents along the route are having to make serious changes in their daily schedules only to accommodate the new system – some are leaving much earlier, some delaying their departure to avoid morning time rush on the corridor, while others are switching to other, even longer routes to skip the journey along the corridor.

Residents of South Delhi are stunned by the shape the city is acquiring due to the BRT project. “The city has started looking like a bus stand,” said Wing Commander J.S. Chadda, Coordinator of the United RWAs Joint Action South Delhi Zone. “RWAs will start petitioning MLAs of these areas from Sunday,” said Chadda to seek removal of the ‘death barriers’ he said.

Transport department is fudging facts: there is no improvement, just a complete boycott of the route by commuters.

To the statements issued by transport department officials claiming that the situation has stabilized and that traffic flow was smoother since the last few days, residents have retorted with petulance that the simple truth is that almost every sane person is skipping the route altogether. “You think I am crazy to try and come this way after what I have experienced on the first day. I just take the Siri Fort Road, even though I have to go to Kalindi everyday,” said a harried commuter from Saket.

Overbridges are no solution: the design is all wrong, say experts.

The desperate pitch by the chief Secretary on building overbridges has been summarily dispatched by experts as a pipe dream and a last ditch attempt to save the project. “Overbridges are an archaic solution to this problem that demands a complete overhaul. Just because a mistake has been made does not mean that another must be made. The station in the centre of the road was an appalling idea and nothing can fix it except complete removal from that position,” said Amrit Lal a former member of the LG’s expert committee on traffic.

For more information, please contact 9811014089 or call Ashok Sethi on 9810192365, P.K. Roy on 9811854757, WingCo Chadda on 931262900

Press Release

RWAs to protest Yamuna Action Plan – II.

Accountability for siphoning off YAP-I funds is must before new project is attempted, say Residents.

- MCD, JBIC comes under fire.

New Delhi, 15th April 2008: RWAs today came out strongly against the initiation of yet another Yamuna Action Plan project in spite of all round condemnation of the large scale embezzlement of funds under the YAP-I project where an estimated Rs.1200 crores was spent without a single cusec of the Yamuna either cleaned or recharged.

Residents are appalled that the Delhi Government has even tried to attempt a second go at the infamous project with barely six months before its tenure ends. What is also shocking, say residents, is that the MCD has been brought into the project which itself suffers the worst reputation for corruption.

“This is abnormal behaviour on the part of the Delhi government. Clearly, the need to launch another phase after the rout of the first phase is a pointer to the incentives involved,” said Atul Goyal of United RWAs Joint Action [URJA], the apex body of RWAs of Delhi hinting that the money that will be siphoned off the project once again.

Members have also expressed surprise at the callousness of the Japan Bank of International Co-operation [JBIC] for agreeing to release funds to a project that has established itself as a benchmark in corruption, inaction and failure in such projects worldwide.

The YAP-I project has become a text book case that is now internationally considered as a benchmark for failure in development projects. The model of cooperation, the proponents involved and the monitoring mechanisms have all been cited as the worst ever and yet the JBIC has found it fit to re-release funds to this money guzzling enterprise,” said Sanjay Kaul, President, People’s Action expressing surprise at the development.

Activists working with People’s Action on the Yamuna issue are also aghast and have indicated that they will join the opposition to this project in earnest. Manoj Misra who has petitioned strongly against constructions on the river bed echoed similar sentiments, “ Where is the question of starting a second phase of a project whose first phase was never seen?,” he asked petulantly.

Diwan Singh, another member of the group’s planning sub-committee said “The Government of Delhi is criminally indicted in the YAP scam and as such has no moral authority to extend the scheme nor the right to attempt a similar fraud on the people of Delhi.”

People’s Action has said that it would start an agitation to force the government to withdraw the scheme.

Press Release

Mayor calls meeting on formation of Resident Ward Committees: People's Action tell MCD leaders benefits of systemic improvement in ward level governance.

New Delhi March 27th, 2008: Members of People's Action and United RWAs Joint Action[URJA] were invited by Mayor of Delhi for a meeting last evening with MCD brass including the Chairman, Standing Committee Vijendra Gupta and Leader of the House, Subhash Arya along with other key members of the House to discuss the formation of Resident Ward Committees in all wards of Delhi.

Residents Ward Committees is being proposed by People's Action as a step towards improving grass roots democracy and enhancing ward level governance through principles of accountability, transparency and cooperation. The founding principles of the RWC come from the 74th Amendment of the Constitution that mandate the formation of urban Panchayats and specifically Article 243ZD that allocates for the setting up of District Planning Committees to direct development works at micro levels.

People's Action has been advocating the formation of RWCs as a powerful means of reducing corruption, improving the efficiency of the Municipal Corporations and overall lend strength to the tenets of local self government.

Members who attended the meeting were taken through the process of formation of the RWCs which included a format for application, a list of rules, mandatory requirements for participation, procedure and conduct and a process of mentoring the concept at ward levels by members of the advocacy group until the programme take root.

Based on the discussions and exchange of views between members, Mayor Arti Mehra has indicated an in-principle agreement on the concept and sought some specific changes in the format for application and formation procedures and fixed the first week of April as a tentative date for finalisation of details.

Members of people's Action who attended the meeting said that the meeting was fruitful in that more conviction was seen among MCD leaders and were hopeful that a progressive concept such as the RWC will not have to wait much longer.

“We have been lobbying for the RWC to be made mandatory for over a year and a half and we seem to be making some progress now. It is our expectation that we will see far sighted leadership and a desire to see the MCD rid of many of its shortcomings from the MCD leaders and have the programme soon in place,” said Sanjay Kaul after emerging from the meeting. Atul Goyal and Varinder K. Arora of the group were the other members that accompanied Mr. Kaul to the meeting.

Press Release

Residents criticize Delhi Budget for misplaced focus: too much emphasis on new investments for an interim budget, too little attention to essentials.

- Fiscal irresponsibility and imprudent financial governance, say People's Action members
- Too little, too late, say others

New Delhi, 25th March, 2008: Residents have today termed the Delhi Government's out-going year Budget as both, a violation of the spirit of fiscal responsibility, as well as nakedly ambitious for votes.

In a severe indictment of the main thrust of the budget, members have pointed out the abnormality of expenditure when the Government has barely six months before elections are called. "We were expecting a vote-on-account or at the most an interim budget, but clearly, the government is trying to make hay while the sun shines," said Sanjay Kaul, President, People's Action

"What we are seeing is an attempt at exploitation of the state treasury in the wake of impending elections, which makes for bad policy and precedent and it will most certainly translate into hollow promises," added Kaul.

Members say that the spend-skew is apparent. "The mantra is to spend, spend and spend without analyzing the projects, the purpose or the process," said R.C. Kamboj of Rohini Federation of RWAs.

While the spend on transportation is being questioned for its bias, on the social welfare initiatives announced by the government RWAs are certain that the money so disbursed will only fuel corruption in an election year. "Each of the sops announced only extends an MLAs influence in his zone as he takes credit for nominating such recipients. This will lead to unprecedented unfairness and corruption," said Vinay Walia of Lado Sarai RWA. Worse, residents claim that the essential issues that impact Delhiites have not been addressed and no attempt made to rein in inflation.

Power:

The real issue of power has not been addressed – the claim of absolving 5 lakh odd consumers of old dues is both imprudent and impudent : on the one hand it rewards a crime much against policy and on the other hand it casts a burden on the honest bill payer vide higher tariffs and the honest tax payer to sustain frequent subsidization. The more incongruous item is the claim by the Finance Minister of having brought down theft losses by 25% and yet extending a further subsidy to DISCOMS to retain power tariff to current levels. "Clearly, the two do not add up. If theft has reduced it means unbilled power has now been billed and profits booked. In which case there should be no reason to extend subsidies to power companies", said B.S. Sachdeva of Keshavpuram RWA.

Water:

Residents argue that the plans to increase outlay for water by another 250 odd crores seems like almost destined to go waste. "First, this government has chosen its last year in office to initiate projects for water

treatment plants and each of the proposed plants will in all probability never take off. On a more serious note, in a situation where the DJB has confirmed that 40% of water pumped in Delhi is unaccounted for, this expenditure will only increase the value of unaccounted water being supplied,” said Sushil Kumar of Dwarka. RWA members insist that a better use of money would had been to consolidate water delivery systems through an audit of resources, re-planning of network and better distribution mechanisms before investing in such projects

Urban Development:

RWAs are unhappy with the poor allocation for this most important aspect of the city's budget. Members claim that Delhi needs spaces to be constructed urgently to accommodate its teeming millions, but that the budget has nothing except some feel good indicators of JNNURM funds. This city needs more commercial spaces so that pressure on residential areas would ease. On the other hand, for an interim budget, the proposal for building houses for the poor, apart from being an insincere promise, is also a questionable strategy towards sustainable urban planning. “It is not a joke to construct 1 lakh dwelling units. The Government has to first tell us where they intend to find such a land bank, how the process of identification of such poor will be formulated more importantly, whether it will be in consonance with fundamentals of sustainable city planning,” said Alpana Kishore, a group member of People's Action working on urban planning issues.

Public Transport:

Members of RWAs across the city are mystified by the abnormal spend on Buses prompting one to ask how replacing existing buses will improve the system. “Clearly, this is only a procurement policy and has no potential to impact the system which will continue as before. On the other hand with the loss making DTC at its helm, these buses will only push the corporation more into the red,” said Naresh Ummat of Naraina Vihar RWA. The absence of any new direction on making the public transport more robust has led People's Action members to conclude that the lion's share of the budget has been wasted on upgradation of machinery [buses], whereas the system management will continue as before. “The paltry allocation for the other transport systems such as the BRT etc is only indicative of the Government's admission that the project is flawed,” said Ummat.

Education:

Education has been paid lip-service, complained members, in the budget. The sops for uniforms etc being irrelevant, members argue that up-gradation of schools when the rampant failure rate in Government Schools remains the bigger problem is like curing a fever but ignoring the disease. In the context of the severe shortage of government schools and the poor quality of teaching in such schools, an investment of such a level is merely a contractor's dream item. “The Finance Minister has once again failed the real intent of such funding – to expand the education net, build more schools and enhance the quality of education delivery in the Capital,” said Amit Agarwal of Vasant Kinj RWA.

Health:

By its own admission the Budget has ignored the critically important sector of health and health facilities. For a city-state that hears of horrendous tales of inefficiency, corruption and incapacity to have not allocated to increase hospital beds and efficiency of health services delivery is akin to criminal neglect. “It seems that the Delhi Government thinks a shiny new low-floor bus is a more important indicator of a state's health than it's hospitals,” said Sanjay Kaul of People's Action.

Excise policy revamp:

While members have welcomed a rationalization of the Excise policy from the Punjab Act as fundamentally progressive, they have termed the timing as unnecessarily wrong. “For an out-going Government to tinker with such long term policy matters is both unwarranted and unheard of. Besides the state of Delhi has more crucial issues to deal with than to worry about whether the drinking age needs to be brought down by a few years or not,” said Varinder K. Arora of Kiran Vihar RWA.

Commonwealth Games Expenditures:

Residents are deeply angered at the attention provided in the Budget towards the CG 2010 games. “For something that will be on for 11 days and then become a cash cow for bureaucrats and politicians the abnormal allocation towards stadia upgradation etc. is a serious case of financial irregularity. All these facilities which are being created in the names of infrastructure are only specific to sport and an 11-day event after which all this money will go to seed, just like the Asiad experience,” said Atul Goyal of Karol Bagh RWA.

Social Welfare:

Residents are also angered at the abnormal emphasis on sops, claiming that each of the disbursements under different heads, be it Aam Aadmi Bima Yojna, old age and widow's pension, girl child financial assistance, uniform subsidy, is clearly indicative of unchecked and unmonitored doles at the cost of tax payer's money. Commenting on the generous handouts proposed in the Budget, Wing Commander Jasbir Chadda of East of Kailash RWA said, “ This government has used our hard earned money to make large donations to extract political and election mileage”.

Environment:

RWAs have not missed the silence of the Delhi government on the environment issue. “For a government that is claiming increase in green cover after uprooting thousands upon thousands of trees for the Metro, the BRT, the malls on the ridge and now even the Yamuna banks, the fraud is showing up like never before,” said Manoj Misra, an activist working closely with People's Action on the city's environmental issues. “No wonder there is not a penny for the environment in the state, unless of course it is the happy prospect of embezzling more funds under the Yamuna Action Plan,” he added sarcastically.

Overall, residents have termed the Budget a huge opportunity lost which could have consolidated ongoing projects and laid out mechanisms for better fiscal control and counter inflationary measures.

Press Release

DERC's tariff order contradicts State policy. BYPL shortfall penalizes BRPL and NDPL customers. NDMC hike illogical.

- 5 paise increase across categories flouts Government policy of taxing the higher end consumer - makes the low end consumer pay more.

New Delhi, 13th March 2008: In a strange contradiction of its mandate and its role, the DERC seems to have made two cardinal mistakes in one go with its newest tariff order for Delhi. While on the one hand it has punished the lowest-end consumer of electricity with the highest rate hike, it has also penalized consumers of NDPL and BRPL, almost two-thirds of the state, for the inefficiency of BYPL. Now it has also imposed a Fixed Charge on NDMC area consumers for no ostensible reason except that the law provides for it.

The stated policy of the Government of India as regards consumption and billing is that the higher –end consumer will pay more. That is why the consumption pattern is billed in categories that levy higher rates for higher consumption e.g. lowest slab of Rs 2.40 for those consuming under 200 units, higher slab of Rs. 3.90 for those consuming between 200 and 400 units, and the highest slab of Rs. 4.60 for those consuming more than 400 units. But by ordering an increase of 5 paise per unit across all three categories, the DERC has ended up charging the lower end consumer the maximum in percentage terms, while costing the highest end consumer the least.

Consequently, the new tariff order puts a burden of increase of 2.08% on the consumer consuming less than 200 units, 1.28% on those consuming 200-400 units and only 1.08% on those consuming more than 400 units in a complete reversal of policy.

In another faux pas, while the DERC has confirmed that NDPL and BRPL were revenue surplus for the next two financial years 2008 and 2009, it is the shortfall of Rs. 20 crores by BYPL that has necessitated the tariff increase across the board because it takes the support of uniform tariff policy. Residents argue that in effect, this is a retrograde step that instead of penalizing a defaulting company actually penalizes the consumers of not only that company, but even those consumers who it does not supply power to!

To top it all, today's news about imposing a surcharge in the form of Fixed Charge for consumers in NDMC areas has only deepened the mystery as to whether the DERC is in any position to manage the situation or it is crushed between the lobbying of DISCOMS, the Power Ministry and the CM on the one hand and the Electricity Act and its tenets on the other.

“Clearly, the DERC has lost control,” said Sanjay Kaul, President, People's Action. “Its decisions are seeming more and more incoherent and its actions erratic and the effect of all this is that the consumer who it was supposed to protect is being fleeced worse than before,” he added.

Press Release

RWAs find sealing issue losing direction: it has become a self defeating exercise, with politicians trying to harm residents to gain electoral advantage, say residents.

- People's Action proposes a return to the drawing board. Court should order that a plausible scheme is developed first.

New Delhi, 11th March 2008: RWAs in the city have termed the current sealing drive as a 'headless chicken' run.

At a meeting held on Saturday last week United RWAs Joint Action [RWA] group heads from different zones of Delhi met with a number of petitioners who complained of sealing drives within their colonies by the Monitoring Committee leading to serious confusion on what is legitimate and what isn't, amid charges of ad-hocism and Dictator style operations by the Monitoring Committee.

The lack of clarity and information has compounded the problem and the sense of insecurity has brought a large number of residents together on this issue. RWAs who had earlier petitioned for stopping of commercial activities in residential areas are disappointed at the turn of events. "The whole idea of the action was to act as a deterrent and stop future encroachments in residential areas. But now half of our members are themselves running pillar to post fearing sealing and wondering whether they are running a *bona fide* business from their houses or not, putting us completely on the back foot," said a RWA office bearer from South Delhi without wishing to be named.

Many RWAs find the sealing issue becoming a tit for tat game between politicians now. "All those councilors and MLAs who were protesting with residents before the MCD Elections have disappeared. They are actually gleeful that the people's harassment continues because they want the BJP to face the repercussions being in power in the MCD", said V.K. Arora of URJA East Delhi.

Affected people are also very angry at the behaviour of the Court and its appointee Commissioners. "What explains the abnormal enthusiasm of the Court after all indications point to a political inability to enforce the drive. There is no way any political party will agree to the drive and to seal only to have a notification allow de-sealing later is akin to playing with the livelihood and life of residents of Delhi," said an irate Manoj Sharma of Shahdara.

In the same vein, affected residents are also critical of the single-point agenda of Court commissioners who they claim are applying the Court's orders more randomly than systematically. "In such a scenario, residents are already awaiting a political backlash that will result in their actions coming to nought, which itself makes everyone angry at the zealotry of Court Appointed Commissioners," said Atul Goyal of URJA Central Delhi.

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People's Action members have said that the sealing issue needs going back to the drawing board claiming that the current situation is offering no hope of either city improvement or long terms solution to people's woes due to a clash of interests between political parties. Members insist that the sealing issue has served no end: chaos, politics and political compulsion have dirtied the entire action

Sanjay Kaul, President of People's Action said, "It can be confidently stated that members of the ruling party in Delhi have no interest in a resolution of the problem after having lost power at the MCD polls due to the disenchantment of Delhi voters on this count. They are exacerbating the situation in the hope that the issue will now damage the opposition in the assembly polls. The Opposition on its part is unable to proceed with any proactive plan because they too have an eye on the coming assembly polls and are on the defensive."

"Far from being a corrective scheme, it has degenerated into a bottom rung tactics slanging match between both parties who are using it as a tool to harass and harm residents more than trying to solve the city's planning crises," said Kaul adding that the Delhi Chief Minister has shown no initiative, interest or ability to find a solution.

"The sealings and demolitions issue has its root in the failure of the incumbent and past governments to address the issues of planning in Delhi. There was no reason to create so much panic, so much unrest and insecurity for what is essentially a lack of proactive governance," added Kaul

Kaul was also critical of the Court's persistence on an issue that was clearly becoming out of its reach. "The sealing drive is in danger of becoming a farce. Instead of striving for a reasonable solution within a reasonable time frame, the court's unusual enthusiasm for the sealing process will boomerang with the result that Delhi will lose yet another chance for reformation of its planning laws," he said.

Press Release

People's Action lobbies MCD for Resident Ward Committees – meets MCD top brass to push for reformist concept.

New Delhi, 22nd Feb 2008: Members of People's Action have met the top leadership of the MCD and sent letters to the entire batch of new Councillors outlining the concept of the Resident Ward Committees [RWC] as a means to bring transparency, efficiency and public involvement in the operations of the MCD at the ward level.

“We have been working on this concept for the last one and a half year and have tried to educate councillors, particularly the MCD top brass which includes the Mayor, the Leader of the House and the Leader of Opposition as well as the Standing Committee Chairman on the fundamentals of the concept,” said Sanjay Kaul, President People's Action.

The Resident Ward Committee is an extension of the 74th Amendment of the Constitution under Article 243ZD which propagates the ideals of local self government through various means. The RWC envisages involving all RWAs within a ward to nominate one person to the Committee of which the Councillor is an integral part. Each RWC must hold one mandatory meeting per month and at the end of the financial year, the Councillor must present an Annual Report of accounts at a public meeting in the ward.

“We believe that the formation of the RWC and its two central points will revolutionize the working of the MCD, increase transparency and accountability, enhance engagement between the Councilor and residents and create grounds for a more efficient working of the local body,” said Kaul.

Notably, the response from the MCD top brass has been encouraging.

“We are happy to report positive responses from the Leader of the House Mr Subhash Arya as well as the Leader of Opposition in the House Mr. J. K. Sharma on the issue. We have gone over repeated drafts of the procedural aspects of the RWC and based on our last meeting with Mr. Subhash Arya and we expect to see forward movement on this within the next month”, said Atul Goyal, Central Delhi Coordinator for United RWAs Joint Action [URJA]

The outlines of the concept have already been discussed with Mayor Arti Mehra who has encouraged the plan. Similarly, Mr. Vijendra Gupta, Chairman of the Standing Committee has acknowledged the necessity of such a system after seeking a few modifications in the format..

“Accordingly a 25-point procedural regulatory framework has been officially submitted to Mr. Subhash Arya, Mr J.K. Sharma and others for further action. A copy of the same will also be despatched to all registered RWAs of Delhi as well as all 272 Councillors for execution at the local level,” said Goyal

“People's Action representatives in all wards will act as facilitators wherever required and desired”, said Sanjay Kaul, emphasizing that the new MCD House could create history by adopting the RWC model for good governance.

Press Release

People's Action will mobilize residents to participate in Panchayat Polls.

Gurgaon, 22nd February 2008: At an internal meeting held this week, People's Action has taken an in-principle decision to mobilize residents to participate in Panchayat and Zila Parishad Elections in Gurgaon which are due in March end. This decision has been taken with a view to extend support to identified candidates for the elections to the Panchayat, which may be done in conjunction with the GRP.

The Gurgaon Panchayat Elections have become a curious mix where many urban areas are still notified as villages and consequently the eligible voters in some villages are far outnumbered by colony residents. "This seeming anomaly is actually a unique opportunity to integrate the aspirations of both the villages and the urban settlers", says Sanjay Kaul, President People's Action. Adding that "Gurgaon cannot prosper until all its parts achieve a matching quality of civic life", Kaul declared that "this takes the message of clean politics and good governance deep inside the villages and into the psyche of our village brethren".

B.K. Samadhiya, an associate of People's Action and a member of GRP has already entered into talks with counterparts in the areas of Chakkarpur, which includes colonies like Saraswati Vihar, Maruti Vihar and parts of DLF. The voter populations of these new areas is almost three times the numbers in the villages, and although the village voters vote in heavy numbers, the sheer numerical strength of these colonies cannot be ignored.

"Notwithstanding the voter turnout in the assembly elections from new areas, our effort will revolve around mobilizing them to once again come out and involve themselves in the political process, as that is the only way to clean politics and establish good governance," said Kaul.

Villages identified so far for such intervention by People's Action include Chauma which includes Palam Vihar and New Palam Vihar; Carterpuri which includes sectors such as 23, 23A; Silokhra which includes South City; Nathupur which includes major parts of DLF, Kanhai which includes Sushant Lok, and Wazirabad which has a large population on new settlers in Sector 56. Other areas such as Dundahera, Sukhrali, Sikandarpur and Jharsa are also under consideration.

It is expected that People's Action will start a campaign in tandem with the GRP as soon as negotiations for support of candidates is finalized by end of February.

Press Release

Residents demand multiple routes to and from Gurgaon: toll access unconstitutional, say residents; prepared for agitation if demands are not met.

New Delhi, 20th Feb., 2008: Residents on both sides of the Delhi-Gurgaon border are agitated at the manner in which commuters are being arm twisted into paying toll charges without having the option to enter or exit Gurgaon from any other road.

“The recent developments regarding toll access between borders on the NH-8 on the one hand and limiting the access route to just one from the MG Road side puts the concept of the National Capital Region [NCR] into question,” said Sanjay Kaul, President, People’s Action. “I completely understand the point of residents who question the validity of single point access between contiguous states like Haryana and Delhi”

“This is a monopoly that is making us pay twice over for what has been our right since Independence”, said Col. Ratan Singh, Chairman of JAFRA, the RWA Federation of Gurgaon, “Free access to states without hindrance is a fundamental right. I should have the right to choose to go to Delhi without using the toll road ”, he said suggesting that residents were prepared to start an agitation for their rights.

Shashi Sharma, Convenor of People’s Action in Gurgaon has said that the toll charge methodology of the private party is liable to legal scrutiny. “The state cannot force people to use a paid service and alternate routes are a necessary ingredient of the freedom of choice”, he said.

Residents on the other side of the border echo the same sentiments. Residents in Delhi argue that paying a toll charge for a speedway makes sense only for those who wish to cut down time and travel long distances. “For someone in Mahipalpur going to the Airport and paying the same as the man going to Manesar is downright unfair,” said Col. Shivraj of Munirka RWA.

Besides, residents argue that the speed limit of 60 and the long queues at the toll disqualifies the facility from any advantage. “Let’s be honest, neither can we speed on this way, nor do we save time eventually, so what is the charge for,” asks Sonali Agarwal of Saket who has been traveling to Gurgaon via MG road now.

South Delhi access roads in cold storage: DDA pays no heed

South Delhi residents suffer even more due to traffic snarls on the MG road side now. “First there is the Metro construction, then the pillars of the Metro are eating up seven feet of road width and now a number of people are taking this route only to avoid the toll barrier pile ups and the toll charge, making this road another hell,” said Vijay Raghavan of Mehrauli Federation of RWAs who travels everyday to Gurgaon on this route.

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Planners have cautioned that the DDA has not catered to growing traffic along this route and failed to allocate for alternate routes connecting South Delhi to Gurgaon. “While the Haryana Government is keen to provide at least two access routes to South Delhi – one towards Vasant Kunj and another towards Faridabad, the DDA is simply showing no signs of urgency”, said an Urban Planner in Gurgaon.

People's Action's Planning Committee members have also noticed that the draft zonal plans issued by the DDA do not cater to the booming traffic and transportation challenges that are developing along the two neighbouring states.

People's Action has written to the Minister of Urban Development Mr. Jaipal Reddy last week seeking a meeting to bring the simmering discontent to his notice. “However, we have not yet received any positive indication that his ministry is seized of the matter ”, said Atul Goyal of United RWAs Joint Action [URJA] of Delhi.

Press Information

The BRT Dilemma for Delhi Government : developing a pilot is destined to fail; a multi zonal development is bound to kill more.

- A bad idea costs money, and lives, say residents. Another Yamuna Action Plan in the making, say group members

New Delhi, 19th Feb., 2008: People's Action has reacted to the latest declaration by the Chief Minister about calling off any further development of other BRT lines as a catch-22 situation for the Government's much touted transportation policy.

“Everywhere in the world wherever a Bus Rapid Transit system works along High Capacity Bus Corridors, the key to its success is an ‘integrated model’ which works with multi-disciplinary mechanisms allowing seamless transfer and transit to commuters. That requires that the entire model is implemented in one go and only then opened to public. The BRT system cannot work if the system is implemented in parts,” said Sanjay Kaul, President of People's Action

In November 2007, People's Action had challenged the HCBS [now renamed BRT] system by sending a 21-point questionnaire to the project proponents, the IIT based advisory group that claims credit for this plan. It was only after the proponents received this questionnaire that the CM came out saying that the entire six routes [corridors] will be developed concurrently and financial clearance was obtained post haste for the same.

“But now with growing deaths and the traffic chaos showing no signs of dissipating, the CM has backtracked, adding to the certainty that this project is doomed and that it has been a colossal waste of public money and young lives,” said Kaul

“The entire BRT project has been begged, borrowed or stolen from various projects in various parts of the world. It is a classic example of Governmental arrogance and insensitivity to citizen's views,” said Wing Commander J.S. Chadda of United RWAs Joint Action, [URJA] South Delhi.

Experts have confirmed that the fundamental premise of this model is wrong for Delhi. “The BRT works only where there is vast road width availability which allows for no reduction of road space. Even if we expect people to start transferring to Bus travel, the essential component of habit transition time is just not provided for”, said a technocrat without wishing to be named.

People's Action is more stringent in its comments. “This project suffers from a blinkered view,” says Kaul. “It expects High Networth Individuals to scale down to bus travel but does not envisage elevating cyclists to the same mode – in fact it secures and concretizes one-fourth the road width permanently for them. This is so illogical and hare brained, it deserves to be accorded a medal for buffoonery”, said Kaul.

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Kaul confirmed that international companies dealing in implementation of multi-modal bus transit system have repeatedly confirmed that BRT systems only work if implemented in *toto*. “Now the problem for the Government is that if it continues with developing other routes, it will devastate Delhi five times over exactly like the Badarpur stretch has done – uprooting decade old trees, concretizing footpaths, narrowing roads, channeling bus routes and create mayhem by causing accidental deaths – and if it doesn't, the Badarpur line will remain just another glorious example of the CM's expensive miscalculations causing crores of rupees to go down the drain, and killing innocent people to boot”, he added.

Press Release

DDA Zonal Plan Consultation process questioned: residents, planners convey reservations to DDA top brass. To petition LG on issues.

New Delhi, 18th Feb., 2008: The Planning Committee of People's Action comprising urban planners, architects, RWA and NGO representatives and activists having met the DDA Engineer Member Mr. A.K. Sarin along with his team of Officials late last week, conveyed their reservations regarding the current public consultation process on the draft zonal plans..

“We have tried to place on record that the consultation process is inadequately planned in the absence of freely available Zonal Plan documents, inconsistent maps, poorly designed plans and non-detailing of specifics in the maps,” said Alpana Kishore, Convenor of the group's Planning Committee.

The Meeting which was held in the Vikas Sadan Headquarters of the DDA was attended by Kuldip Singh, Alpana Kishore, Sanjay Kaul, Diwan Singh and Atul Goyal on behalf of People's Action Planning Committee.

The sub committee had offered that RWAs could partner with the DDA in a public-private initiative to have a zone wise presentation of the plan to explain to the people what it meant in their locality. Mr V.K. Jain, Additional Commissioner, Planning DDA rejected the plea saying that such an exercise had already been conducted once for the Master Plan. He said, "If anyone wants to raise objections he may employ the means at his disposal to understand these plans. It is not possible to go and explain to thousands of people."

Eminent town planner Kuldip Singh objected to the clear lack of effort to engage the public. "The days when the government was seen as a *mai baap* that could do no wrong have gone. The DDA is now dealing with an articulate, educated, aware public that will not be easily ignored, " he said urging the DDA to engage in a meaningful exercise with the public.

Sanjay Kaul, President, People's Action said, "The DD's response is negative on every count and I am afraid this consultation process will become a hollow exercise if they don't make corrections."

Atul Goyal of URJA raised the issue that the average resident was interested in seeing how his life was going to be impacted by the various developments listed in the plan yet was unable to pinpoint where this development would take place in his locality. Mr. Jain on behalf of DDA replied that this was not in the purview of the zonal plan and would be decided later

Diwan Singh raised the issue of the new zones and the misplaced policy of catering to new migration by creating an entire new city of 12 million people. He forcefully underlined the impossibility of the city's very sustainability if all agricultural land on its outskirts was axed in

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favour of gigantic development. "If the current water supply cannot cater to the existing population, how is it going to cater to double the amount?" questioned Diwan Singh.

Alpana Kishore also raised the point that the policy of the planning authorities should actually be to find ways to *limit* migration and retain the city's sustainability. There was no response to this as DDA's policy direction clearly indicates such a limitation exercise is not even being envisaged - rather a full attempt to welcome the new migrants and create infrastructure for them at the cost of the city itself.

The group has decided to continue their opposition to the half-hearted process and will petition the LG if the DDA does not respond proactively.

The People's Action Planning Committee includes eminent Town Planner Kuldip Singh, environmentalist Ravi Agarwal of Toxic Links, Manoj Misra of Yamuna Jiye Abhiyan, Sanjay Kaul of People's Action, Atul Goyal representing United RWAs Joint Action [URJA] , Architects Ratish Nanda & Arun Virmani, Madhu Kishwar of Manushi, water activist Diwan Singh, Advocate Jasbir Singh Malik and Supreme Court lawyer Anish Dayal.

Press Release

Residents find no solution in sight to sealing issue: Court's observations do not help situation, say RWAs.

New Delhi, 13th Feb. 2008: RWAs have today expressed disappointment that no clear direction has emanated out of the observations of the Court on the sealing issue and the environment of instability and confusion continues.

“The only achievement out of today's hearing is that the suspense continues,” said Atul Goyal of United RWAs Joint Action, Delhi's largest RWA collective.

Residents have lamented that the Court's response to the Notification issued by the Government is not looking consistent with earlier orders.

“I am afraid there seems to be a perceptible change in the response this time in the Court's view as regards the validity of the notification, its timing and its context. Earlier Notifications by the Government were met with a more stringent reaction from the Court. However this time, disallowing a stay on the Notification has meant that a lot of people are going to read a message of relief in the orders,” said Wing Commander Jasbir Chadda of URJA South Delhi.

Sanjay Kaul, President, People's Action said that residents were looking for an order that would take the situation towards some solution. “But today's proceedings have only extended the sense of insecurity in the city. Nobody will take this order at face value and go for de-sealing if they fear that on July 7th it could be sealed again”, he said.

Press Release

Citizen group welcomes deferment of last date for filing objections on zonal plans by DDA: seeks 4 improvements before genuine public consultation can begin.

New Delhi, 4th February, 2008: People's Action group members have today welcomed the decision of the DDA to defer the last date for filing objections to its proposed zonal plans based on a request made earlier to the Vice Chairman and the LG that the availability of the plans was deficient and most people were unable to access these.

“While we have thanked the DA for the deferment, we have also sent them a letter outlining the deficiencies in the current procedure stemming from four issues that need urgent attention”, said Alpana Kishore, Convenor of the group's Planning Committee

Kishore's letter to the Chairman DDA lists out the following issues:

[Quoted text start]

- The Zonal Plans do not specify areas of suggested changes (i.e. street names, actual spaces within localities) etc. and /or specific locations where land use changes are to be made. The zonal plans seem to be hurried replication of the zonal plan *guidelines* as provided in the MP 2021. By virtue of being an extended version, all such details are required to be mentioned in maximum detail so that people within those communities where such changes are fore drawn can react, respond or rebut the proposals.
- That the zonal Maps released by DDA are inconsistent with each other in terms of style, size, coding and content. They are unclear, fuzzy and/or lacking the basics such as clear consistent colour coding and are illegible to the normal eye for various reasons. If it is difficult for town planners to peruse these plans with a sense of clarity, a lay resident will find the task impossible.
- That the non-availability/incomplete availability of the Zonal Plan documents from the DDA offices is a further obstacle and not everyone has access to an internet in Delhi.
- Finally, as we have requested in our letter dated 22nd January to you, if the DDA does not hold an interactive public meet and session of each plan *in its own Zone*, with a presentation, proper maps and information indicating the full scope of these zonal plans, the exercise may resign itself to undesired tokenism. We reiterate the importance of making this modification in the procedure for consultation as this would give a real chance to RWAs, lay citizens and DDA officials to interact, go over suggestions and understand where the bottlenecks lie. [Quoted text end]

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Kishore has asked for a proactive response form the Vice Chairman's office on the points above.

The Citizens Planning Committee includes eminent Town Planner Kuldip Singh, environmentalist Ravi Agarwal of Toxic Links, Manoj Misra of Yamuna Jiye Abhiyan, Sanjay Kaul of People's Action, Atul Goyal representing United RWAs Joint Action, Architects Ratish Nanda & Arun Virmani, Madhu Kishwar of Manushi, water activist Diwan Singh, Advocate Jasbir Singh Malik and Supreme Court lawyer Anish Dayal.

Press Release

Blueline Victims meet NHRC Chairperson: demand end to discrimination in compensation and seek enquiry to establish responsibility into spate of Blueline deaths of citizens.

New Delhi, 30th January, 2008: A delegation led by members of People's Action today sought to petition the NHRC Chairperson Hon'ble Justice S. Rajendra Babu on the plight of Blueline victims who have been left in the lurch by the Government even after repeated attempts to seek compensation and assistance for families of victims.

“The petition delivered today to the Hon'ble Shri Babu aims to first seeks an end to the discriminatory compensation process followed by the Delhi Government where people dying in an unauthorized *jhuggi* fire are paid ex-gratia mounts immediately for an incident in which there was no Government involvement but in the case of a state-licensed bus repeatedly killing people was not deserving of any compensation,” said Sanjay Kaul, President, People's Action.

It may also be recalled that when 8 people died in Badarpur by a Blueline bus, they were awarded compensation of Rs. 1 lakh immediately, but the others who died earlier of after that incident due to the same Blueline buses were not given any compensation.

While the NHRC officers claimed that a petition had been made to the Commission earlier and the Commission has issued direction on the same, Kaul argued before the Commission that that the current petition was distinct in that it was concerned with a case of Discrimination of compensation award to Blueline death victims and the issue of culpability of the Government of Delhi in the deaths.

Finally, the Chairperson NHRC, Justice S. Rajendra Babu met with five victims who had been organised under the Association of Blueline Victims by People's Action and registered the petition with a promise to take appropriate action.

“This is our last hope,” said Satish Kapoor who along with S.N. Misra, Rajesh Verma, Ms. Bharti and Ms. Parveen met the Chairperson NHRC in the company of People's Action members Atul Goyal, S.P. Gupta and Varinder K. Arora.

While the meeting took place, over forty members of victims families and other members of People's Action who had joined them to express solidarity protested the apathy of the delhi Government and held placards and banners denouncing the Chief Minister and the Transport Minister of Delhi for their inaction and insensitivity on the issue.

Press Release

People's Action forms Citizens Planning Committee to respond to DDA draft zonal plans : non-availability of plans puts public consultation process under pressure; groups writes to DDA for change of format.

New Delhi, 23rd January 2008: In response to the draft zonal plans issued by DDA in pursuance of the Master Plan 2021 and the commencement of the public consultation process, People's Action has constituted a Planning Committee, which includes planning experts, environmental activists, architects, town planners and advocacy group leaders to fashion a coordinated response to these plans on behalf of residents of the city.

In its first communication to the DDA Vice Chairman as a specialist group, the Committee Convenor Alpana Kishore has pointed out that the process of public consultation can not be initiated due to unavailability of the zonal plans on the website or in print. And has also sought a change in format.

“Firstly, the DDA website itself barely has 4-5 plans on the Net out of a total of 15 plans. The plans that are available have no proper maps that illustrate the content of the plan – the ones that are available are not colour coded and extremely unclear and smudged. It is impossible for the lay person to recognize his own residential areas or the streets where massive changes are proposed. A set of complete plans is not available in the DDA office either. This leaves no chance for a full viewing, much less critical assessment”, said Kishore

Ravi Agarwal, a member of the Committee said that the group would like to see this process as a meaningful interaction between the citizens and the authorities with a sense of true participation. “To this end, it would be beneficial for DDA to hold an interactive public meet and session of each plan *in its own Zone*, with a presentation from their side, proper maps and information indicating the full scope of these zonal plans. This would give a real chance to RWAs, lay citizens and DDA officials to interact, go over suggestions and actually understand where the bottlenecks lie ”, he said.

Group members have cautioned that without such an interaction the consultation process will be just another hollow official exercise without any follow up on citizen suggestions, accountability towards the public and a real sense of citizen's participation. “Accordingly we would like to request that the date be pushed forward to mid-April to enable a citizen friendly approach and that a zone wise public meet with stakeholders be organized”, wrote Alpana Kishore in the letter to the DDA Vice Chairman,

The Planning Committee includes eminent Town Planner Kuldip Singh, environmentalist Ravi Agarwal of Toxic Links, Manoj Misra of Yamuna Jiye Abhiyan, Sanjay Kaul of People's Action, Atul Goyal representing United RWAs Joint Action, Architects Ratish Nanda & Arun Virmani, water activist Diwan Singh, Advocate Jasbir Singh Malik and Supreme Court lawyer Anish Dayal. More members are being inducted to enhance the caliber of responses to the zonal plans with a view to create a pro-active expert group for meaningful debate on issues of crucial importance to planning of the city.

Press Release

NHAI Website confirms completion of Delhi-Gurgaon stretch on December 31st 2007: But that is only half the story! **Residents scoff at NHAI excuses: to file RTI application.**

New Delhi, 19th January 2008: Barely five days after members carried out a People's Inauguration of the Flyover section of the Gurgaon Expressway that links the city to Dwarka, Palam and the Airport, NHAI authorities are red in the face to explain what they are waiting for.

While the media has carried reports of various excuses given by NHAI that have ranged from waiting for clearances from RITES to safety tests and checks to a host of conflicting claims by the construction company, the fact remains that NHAI had officially concluded the project on December 31st 2007 and the RTR-Dwarka Palam Airport section was blockaded for no reason except a high-profile inauguration.

Our enquiries had confirmed what we believe was the truth. The NHAI website on its Home Page lists a section titled NHDP under which the Progress link takes us to a Page which lists all the completed stretches on this section as of 31st December 2007: and top of this list of completed stretches is the Delhi-Gurgaon stretch of 36 Kilometers.

But that is not the last word on this issue.

Sanjay Kaul, President People's Action had this to add.: " We had stated on the day of the People's Inauguration of this flyover that this flyover has been in a finished condition for over two months, and not just since December 31st 2007. I am glad to say that the NHAI's Management Information System [MIS] Report number 95, confirms our statement", said Kaul, distributing copies of the MIS Report that shows that the project has been closed with the remark "0' km under implementation" and "100% cumulative length completed in km (%) by end of last month" in the report that was for November 2007.

"This blows the lid off all speculation," said Arvind Mehta of the group. "It is shocking to know that NHAI officials at the top rung have issued blatant lies to media", he said. "We are also concerned that some of these unsubstantiated statements by officials has brought the conduct of the NHAI into suspicion", said Atul Goyal, another member of the group.

"We have today decided to file an RTI on the details of the project and are constituting a citizen's committee to peruse their replies with a view to establishing the terms of the contract, the time frames within which it was contracted to be completed, reasons for delay, cost overruns and official exchanges between the parties concerned including the Ministry of Road Transport on the fixation of the day of Inauguration", said Varinder K Arora of the group.

"This matter which was about the concept of VIP's inaugurating public utilities has now become an issue of inefficiency in a government agency and probable corruption in its execution. These

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we want investigated,” said Major Rohit Sethi, a member of United RWAs Join Action [URJA], Delhi’s largest federation of Resident Welfare Associations.

“The Expressway has been in operation for the last five six months. That stretch includes six or seven flyovers, some much longer than this one. So what’s so special about this patch of the flyover,” asked Naresh Ummat, a People’s Action member from Naraina.

Press Release

Residents meet Power Minister to protest DERC proposals : no question of MYT or ToD without audit of DISCOMS, say residents.

New Delhi, 17th January, 2008: RWA representatives along with members of People's Action today met Power Minister Dr. A.K. Walia to put across serious objections to both, the proposals on MYT and ToD and the manner in which the Public Hearing was conducted charging the DERC with willful disdain for consumer interest.

Rakesh Bhardwaj, RWA President from Sheikh Sarai challenged the process on the grounds that Hindi speaking public of Delhi was not provided with a full copy of the ARRs filed by DISCOMS like English speaking people were. "We were provided a gist of one page for a 1000 pager document. Is that fair," Bhardwaj asked seeking the scrapping of the entire process and starting from a clean slate.

Ashok Prabhakar of Malviya Nagar RWA federation simply refused to hear of the MYT and ToD proposals on the ground that DISCOMS that have been charged with open harassment and financial irregularities could not be given a "blank cheque" for the next four years". Coming down heavily on the DISCOMS, Prabhakar also castigated the DERC for being a mute witness to the exploitation of consumers over the last five years.

Sanjay Kaul, President People's Action placed before the Minister a summation of the major objections residents from across Delhi have expressed on the issue of the Multi Year Tariffs [MTY] and the Time of Day [ToD] metering proposals. "We have provided the Minister the 8 fundamental objections that we have on the very basis of the Public Hearing," said Kaul and which are:

1. It has not taken into account public sentiment in spite of widespread opposition to the performance of the present DISCOMS and their corporate practices
2. It has not accounted for an independent audit of the petitions filed by DISCOMS for the last five years before accepting these as accurate or genuine.
3. The basis of continuation of the contracts of the existing parties is under question.
4. The absence of competition in distribution makes the entire process of privatisation suspect and unilateral, and every tariff increase a result of subsequent monopolization.
5. DISCOMS, particularly BSES, have been accused and found to be frequently guilty of corrupt practices in a great number of instances and these charges have not been investigated so far.
6. To propose a tariff increase at a time when theft recoveries are at their peak and the companies involved in distribution have made record profits is difficult to understand.
7. The condition of privatization was improvement of services, lower tariffs due to competition and continued power supply – all three being unmet, the question of a tariff increase does not arise – the issue of cancellation of contracts does.
8. The Commission has to find a way and means to not only penalise DISCOMS for the harassment meted out to consumers over the last five years, but also secure for us a substantial tariff reduction of at least 25% this fiscal.

"We have also placed on record our objections to the Time of Day metering proposal as an unviable and clever mechanism to increase tariffs through the back door – by charging us more for times of peak necessity and lowest for least necessity," said Kaul.

Press Release

Residents protest ‘inauguration’ delay of Palam flyover – inaugurate it themselves: Protestors cut the ribbon, inaugurate the flyover in the name of the Common Man.

New Delhi, 14th January, 2008: Group members of People’s Action today collected at the point where the Palam Airport flyover has been blocked for over two months now in spite of being ready only because of reported unavailability of the UPA Chairperson Sonia Gandhi to inaugurate it.

It has also been reported that the CM of Delhi has sought to delay the opening so that it can be done closer to the impending assembly elections and thereby gain her party some advantage.

Denouncing the trend of using inauguration of public works for personal aggrandizement, Sanjay Kaul, President of People’s Action said, “It is shocking that the CM of Delhi has willingly allowed Delhi’s commuting public to suffer serious inconvenience and painful traffic snarls only for electoral advantage. This inauguration mania has to end and politicians have to be made to understand that it is our money that has made these flyovers possible.”

Today’s protest was joined by residents of Delhi and People’s Action members from as far as Dwarka, Mayur Vihar, Rohini, East of Kailash, Vasant Kunj, Rajendra Nagar and Karol Bagh.

Protestors drew a ribbon across the barricaded flyover and proceeded to cut the ribbon themselves. Cutting the ribbon jointly with other residents Sanjay Kaul said “ We the people of Delhi cut this ribbon and pronounce this Flyover inaugurated in the name of the Common Man”. The protestors also broke a coconut and performed *aarti* to give religious sanctity to the inauguration programme.

“Delhiites have suffered interminable delays on account of this flyover. It is two years behind schedule and now for the last two months the NHAI is twiddling its thumbs just because some big-shot party President is unavailable. Are we expected to suffer only because some politician has a chest infection,” said an angry Wing Commander J.S Chadda of South Delhi who faces the roadblock each time he has to go to the Airport.

Arguing against the defence of the NHAI that the flyover was not ready yet owing to some side walling, residents argued that it was being delayed purposely, to accommodate dates by the UPA Chairperson. “The UPA Chairperson is a political post. Why should a Government of India entity like the NHAI [National Highways Authority of India] have to wait for a political party president to open this flyover to the public,” asked S.P. Gupta of Rajendra Nagar.

Varinder K. Arora, a member who came all the way from East Delhi to show solidarity with the cause said that residents were thinking of filing a PIL in Court to ban inauguration of public works by politicians or government officials.