



INTACH

DELHI CHAPTER

Weekly News Clippings – 111

28th July-3rd August

Editor's Note

'Monumental' row has old roots

MCD calls consultants for Town Hall makeover

Saving history: work on to restore 10th-century fort city

ASI takes on Siri challenge, site in spotlight during Games

Qutub mosque row: ASI says won't allow prayers; won't pay for access, says Muslim lobby

Encroachment, budget in way of Tughlaqabad restoration

As rainwater flows down the drain, plans on to tap Yamuna surplus

Prayers in Qutub: Bukhari talks tough

Neglect behind toppling of Delhi's trees

Prayers row: Extra vigil sought for monuments

Protected monuments go missing

'We wished to save the river, we will hold protests'

ASI to wrap up 'Tughlaq jigsaw'

Delhi has lost 12 monuments

Delhi monuments to get audio guides ahead of C'wealth Games

'MONUMENTAL' ROW HAS OLD ROOTS

Since March, hundreds of people have been allegedly forcing their entry into Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)-protected monuments in the city and offering prayers violating heritage laws. However, even if the prayers may be a recent phenomenon, the dispute is not. The roots can be traced back to July 2007 when the then Minister for Minority Affairs had taken up with Minister of Culture the issue of maintenance and management of Muslim religious monuments under the ASI umbrella. The Minister's demand was in connection with a Central Waqf Council resolution wanting the ASI to maintain the sanctity of religious monuments under its protection and involve state waqf boards in their management. The same year, a joint parliamentary committee on Waqf had recommended in October 2008 that the process of consultation be hastened between ASI and the Central Waqf Council for entering into agreement over the waqfs under the protection of the ASI.

SOURCE

28th July 2009, Hindustan Times

MCD CALLS CONSULTANTS FOR TOWN HALL MAKEOVER

After announcing elaborate plans of converting Town Hall--the headquarter of Municipal Corporation of (MCD)--into a hotel, the civic agency has taken one step back and invited expressions of interest to engage a consultant for preparing a detailed project report. The civic body is now planning to ask various stakeholders to give their opinion to decide the fate of Town Hall. A notice has been issued by the civic body inviting expression of interest from all the concerned stakeholders for preparation of detailed project report for the redevelopment of Townhall and surrounding areas. "The consultant will try to find out what the stakeholders such as the residents of Chandni Chowk, traders, government bodies want the building to be used as," said a senior MCD official. "We have not yet carried out a project of such a magnitude so we want to engage a company to do that for us considering it's a heritage building." According to the MCD, the consultant will prepare a detail project report for Townhall and its surrounding premises which includes conducting a survey of traffic, its pattern and its impact on the site-be it vehicular, pedestrian and metro. Under the restoration plan of Town Hall, the MCD is planning to set up an experiential museum, convocation and.

theater hall, open-air amphitheatre for local performances, library and art gallery, a Haat along the lines of Delhi haat with underground multi-level parking, a food court/plaza and a five star hotel--sarai. There are certain other MCD establishments close to Townhall, housing various department offices of the civic body, press or area being used as godowns

SOURCE

28th July 2009, Hindustan Times

SAVING HISTORY: WORK ON TO RESTORE 10TH – CENTURY FORT CITY

QILA Rai Pithora will soon stand on its 25 bastions again, as the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) works on restoring what was the first city of Delhi. The first phase of the project to conserve and develop the seven cities of Delhi ahead of next year's Commonwealth Games involves four of the cities that preceded the modern-day Capital: Qila Rai Pithora, Siri, Tughlaqabad and Adilabad. Built by the Tomars and later taken over and strengthened by Prithviraj Chauhan in the 10th century, Qila Rai Pithora, along the Mehrauli Badarpur Road, has been marked out for scientific clearing and conservation. In ruins at present, it was under DDA jurisdiction for several decades before being transferred to ASI four years ago. With most bastions in ruins and major chunks of rocks dismantled from the walls, ASI is first fortifying the bastions and fort ramparts. "The land and monuments were in neglect for years and there are overgrown bushes. We are clearing them and simultaneously carrying out fortification work," an ASI official involved with the project said. A mixture of lime, brick powder and adhesives like belguri, gum, and jaggery is used for a compact mix to reshape the dilapidated bastions. The project cost is estimated at Rs 1.5 crore, and more than 200 workers are engaged in it. Officials said more workers will be involved once the major masonry work begins. Though the entire city in its original avatar is impossible to be restored, as new structures and roads have cut across its geography over time, officials said extensive work is planned to conserve large portions of the city. The main wall of Qila Rai Pithora has 25 bastions, of which 15 will be fortified this year-end, officials said. The remaining bastions will be taken up in the next phase, they said. A senior ASI official said, "Once fortification work is completed, the horticulture department of ASI will pave the trail alongside the bastions and develop it into a park. As the bastions lead up to Jamali Kamali in Mehrauli Archaeological Park, the larger plan is to connect Qila Rai Pithora to the park and make it a ticketed site. "The Central Secretariat-Badarpur line of Metro runs past the structure. PRAYERS PUT ASI IN A FIX while a section of Mehrauli residents are "forcibly entering" protected monuments every Friday to offer prayers, ASI officials said the Shahi Imam of Jama Masjid allegedly made inflammatory statements in front of Qutab Minar late Monday evening. Apprehending communal tension, ASI officials stayed away. They said they would approach the police to thwart further moves to offer prayers in protected monuments "by force".

SOURCE

28th July 2009, Indian Express

ASI TAKES ON SIRI CHALLENGE, SITE IN SPOTLIGHT DURING GAMES

RESTORING Siri, largely considered the second city of Delhi, built by Alauddin Khilji in 1311 AD, is proving to be a challenge for the Archaeological Survey of India. Major portions of the fort walls and bastions are under debris and thick vegetation. The ASI is placing special emphasis on Siri, around Siri Fort in South Delhi, considering the possibility of unearthing an undiscovered city. An amount of Rs 3.41 crore has been sanctioned for developing Siri; seven bastions and an adjoining wall are being unearthed and restored as part of the first phase of work. "The land here was with the DDA till 2004. It was taken over by us when scientific clearing confirmed the possibility of finding the remains of an old city here," an ASI official working on the project said. "Since the land was unused, there is thick vegetation here and these have to be cleared before any excavation or restoration work is taken up. In fact, this is delaying the project," he said. There are bastions along this wall, some of which have been seriously damaged having been under debris for ages. "As the bastions and the walls are in a very bad shape, we are trying to restore them according to a

certain pattern found in the bastions that are preserved and are in a better shape. Brick aggregate of 2mm to 5mm and veneering stone is being used to compact the walls and bastions so that there is no seepage," the official said. After the fort walls and bastions are restored, the horticulture department of ASI will develop paths alongside the structures into a park. There is a proposal to illuminate the area during the Commonwealth Games. "We have written to the Tourism department and they have agreed to illuminate the entire stretch that will be restored. This will help highlight the restored portions of the historic city," the official said.

SOURCE

29th July 2009, Indian Express

QUTUB MOSQUE ROW: ASI SAYS WON'T ALLOW PRAYERS; WON'T PAY FOR ACCESS, SAYS MUSLIM LOBBY

THE Masjid-e-Qutub Minar is not the only historical monument being used for prayers by the Mehrauli Muslim Samaaj Sudhaar Society. The Archaeological Survey of India has identified four other protected monuments in the Mehrauli area that are being used for Friday prayers without its permission. "According to the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act of 1958, if a monument is not being used for any worship at the time of taking over by ASI, we cannot allow worship of any kind there," an ASI official said. Members of the society, on the other hand, have objected to not being allowed inside the mosque without a ticket. "We want them to allow worshippers inside without tickets," Choudhary Showkat, society chairperson, said. The Qutub Complex is a ticketed monument. The ASI decided to ask for tickets from mosque goers on July 24, Showkat said. "They have been asking us for tickets for two weeks now," Sher Mohammad, Imam of the mosque, said. "I have been the Imam of this mosque for 33 years. They didn't levy any charge on people visiting the mosque before." A boundary wall was constructed by ASI in 1996 to prevent mosque goers from visiting other monuments in the complex without tickets. The ticket counter was also positioned such that mosque goers could enter only the mosque without buying a ticket. Shahi Imam Maulana Syed Ahmed Bukhari, Imam of Jama Masjid, who visited the mosque on Monday, said: "I find it wrong that mosque goers have to buy tickets. I will visit the mosque on Friday and if they ask for tickets, I will court arrest." Bukhari told Newline: "In September 1996, after my father's intervention, the ticket counter was positioned at another gate so that mosque goers could visit without paying for the ticket. We want that the counter be placed at that gate again." ASI officials said the society started offering Friday prayers at Jamali Kamali on March 23, Rajaon ki Baowli on June 5, Mandi Mosque on July 10, and the Mohammadi and Qutub Minar mosques on July 17. "Many a times we have found boys and girls doing all kinds of things here. We decided to start prayers here to keep a check on all such wrongdoings in these pious places," Showkat said. Elsewhere, other religious groups have lodged a complaint at the Mehrauli police station. "They are saying that if one religious group is being given permission to offer prayers, they too should be allowed to offer prayers since the Qutub Complex originally had 28 temples," an ASI official said. "We don't recognize a mosque or a temple; we want the heritage of our country to remain alive. Eminent historian Irfan Habib has, meanwhile, said such encroachments should be stopped. We call upon the Prime Minister, who is also in charge of the Ministry of Culture, to initiate immediate action to save this monument. We also call upon the Chief Minister to rein in all such elements, who are aiding the violation of the 1958 Act."

SOURCE

29th July 2009, Indian Express

ENCROACHMENT, BUDGET IN WAY OF TUGHLAQABAD RESTORATION

THE Tughlaqabad Fort, the third city of Delhi, built by Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq in the 1320s, now stands encroached upon with a large part taken over by unauthorized colonies. While the Archaeological Survey of India has already begun major restoration work on the outer fortifications, the agency is undecided over recreating the interiors of the fort. "Inside the second fort, nearly 116 bigha of land is lal dora and 2,667 bigha is unauthorized colonies. Removing this encroachment will be a difficult and time consuming process, so we have begun work on the outer fortifications," an ASI official working on the project told News line. "The city stood on DDA land."

it was transferred to the ASI in 1995. The encroachment has been there since then," he said. But a court case is on regarding the encroachment after demolitions were carried out in 2001. The Tughlaqabad Village is situated right within the outer fortifications and has posed a problem for the ASI. An amount of Rs 2.25 crore has been sanctioned for the project. But officials working on the project consider this inadequate, as the estimate did not take into account several expenditures like the need to clear jungles in large portions of the fort. A large part of the main fort is in fairly good condition but the outer fortifications that lead towards Badarpur are decaying. The ASI will restore nine bastions and the adjoining wall over the next year. "Lime, brick powder and Badarpur sand is being used to strengthen the outer walls and to restore the bastions. We are also using ashlar stone on the exterior," the official said. Over 120 workers have been engaged in the project to restore the entire 1190m stretch of the outer wall of the fort. Landscaping and illumination of the area is also being planned once the restoration work is completed. A DDA park is also being developed near the fort. The Tughlaqabad Fort was built with high battlements, slanting walls, double-storey bastions, gigantic towers, palaces, mosques and audience halls. There are a number of monuments within the precincts of this fort. It lost its glory after Ghiyasuddin's death as the fort faced an acute water shortage; the Capital was shifted south of the fort to Adilabad by Ghiyasuddin's successor Mohammad Bin Tughlaq.

SOURCE

30th July 2009, Indian Express

AS RAINWATER FLOWS DOWN THE DRAIN, PLANS ON TO TAP YAMUNA SURPLUS

WHILE many low-lying areas were submerged after the heavy showers on Monday, experts say the city would soon return to fighting with dry taps in all likelihood. Reason: there is no provision to collect the rainwater in Yamuna, once Delhi's lifeline. While the river gets around 580 million cubic metres (MCM) water each monsoon, authorities are yet to develop any method to store this surplus. Of this 580 MCM, experts say as much as 280 MCM gets wasted every year. Such is the sorry state that Environment and Forests Minister Jairam Ramesh, speaking on ecosystems, water and climate change, said, "The Yamuna is not a river." It's only in the monsoon, in fact, that the Yamuna comes close to being a river. To address the issue, the Prime Minister's Office held a brainstorming session this month on how to utilise the Yamuna floodwater. Lieutenant-Governor (L-G) Tejendra Khanna, chairman of the Prime Minister-appointed Yamuna River Development Authority, is expected to submit a comprehensive report to the PM soon. But with everything still at the drawing board stage, precious water is going down the drain, literally -- as seen on Monday. A plan to raise the height of Okhla barrage to store Yamuna's water never took off. A 2002 INTACH study, commissioned by the Delhi Jal Board which proposed diverting floodwater to Jahangirpuri's marshlands, was discarded. Strategies to utilize monsoon surplus are on the agenda now. "The plan to raise the level of Okhla barrage could not be implemented as the barrage is in no position to support another meter of construction. But the Lieutenant Governor's report will focus on ways of storing floodwater," Ranjan Mukherjee, Officer on Special Duty to the L-G, said. Experts say the Yamuna flood is essential as it flushes out pollutants in the river, but better ways of utilizing the water are required. One way to do this at present is through `dewatering and refilling of aquifers' on the floodplain, say experts. Before the monsoons, the water table here is dewatered -- that is, meaning water is pumped out for two to three metres so that the water table can recharge itself and prevent flooding during the monsoon. The Central Ground Water Board has 90 wells on the Palla-Burari stretch of the river. And there are plans to do this at more points along stretches identified as Okhla-Jaitpur and Akshardham Sarai Kale Khan, though this has never been done yet. The danger of not paying attention to rainwater flooding, however, was seen on Monday. While the Barapullah drain in Defence Colony is being covered in some areas to create parking space for the Commonwealth Games, the drain overflowed in Defence Colony following just four hours of sharp showers on Monday evening, thereby filling up houses and streets with sludge.

SOURCE

30th July 2009, Indian Express

PRAYERS IN QUTUB: BUKHARI TALKS

Fuelling the controversy over permission to offer prayers inside Qutab Minar complex and other protected monuments under Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), Shahi Imam of Delhi Jama Masjid, Syed Ahmed Bukhari, threatened that he would court arrest unless namaazis were permitted free entry to offer prayers inside such monuments on coming Friday. Bukhari made the announcement at the Qutab Minar complex on Monday afternoon in front of a large gathering. He then led the afternoon prayers at the mosque near the entrance to the Qutab. He said that if Muslims were not permitted to offer namaaz inside such protected monuments without having to buy tickets, he would personally lead them inside. In recent weeks, there have been several instances where ASI complained of forcible entry into several protected monuments like the Qutab complex, Jamali-Kamali, Rajon ki Baoli and Mohammadi mosque for afternoon prayers. According to ASI officials, namaaz is offered at the mosque inside the Qutab complex by a few locals living nearby, and allowing entry of larger groups for prayers could lead to complications. Experts said that this was in violation of the ASI Act. As per the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1954, prayers are allowed in monuments where the activity was already on during the time of notification of the Act. "Under the Act, any historical monument will have to be preserved the same way as it was on the day of notification of the said Act," said a source. "ASI has several churches, temples, mosques, etc under it where prayers are not offered and some of which are declared world heritage sites. The demand by certain communities to throw open such monuments for religious purposes will lead to disturbance of communal harmony. It is against the spirit of conservation," an ASI official said. Bukhari said, the issue first cropped up in 1996 when authorities decided to issue tickets for entry into Qutab complex. "Earlier, only visitors were required to buy tickets and not namaazis. Till recently, entry into the mosque on Fridays was free," said Bukhari. A few weeks back, ASI officials filed a police complaint after a group of people forcibly entered the Qutab Minar complex to offer afternoon prayers. Other ASI monuments that were targeted were Mandi Masjid in Mehrauli, Jamali-Kamali, Mohamaddi mosque and Raja Ki Baoli. Khirki Mosque is also on the target list. ASI officials said these incidents were becoming common occurrences on Fridays. They also complained of police inaction and this has led to the problem becoming more severe.

SOURCE

29th July 2009, Times of India

NEGLECT BEHIND TOPPLING OF DELHI'S TREES

In the past couple of months, Delhi has lost a few hundred trees to squalls and rain. Between Monday and Tuesday, 21 trees fell in the heavy rain though there was no wind. Experts identify old age as one factor but add that improper management by various agencies was also responsible. A large part of central Delhi's lofty greens were planted when the city was being planned. Forest Research Institute that carried out a study of trees in the central vista for NDMC had said that many of the trees were old or diseased and needed to be replaced. "This is a normal phenomenon, especially if the trees are old or decayed. What the government should be doing is regularly replacing such trees, giving preference to those that are diseased and rotting. Many trees on the central vista in Delhi are over 80 years old. They might seem green and strong from outside but may actually be hollow from inside," said Jagdish Kishwan, director general, Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education. Experts believe, however, that many of the casualties could have been avoided if there had been proper selection of species and proper plantation, and the trees had been taken care of. Also, in the course of digging, road-widening etc, roots are usually just chopped off. Not only does that make the tree unstable, it also eventually kills it. According to Ravi Agarwal of Toxics Link, MCD and RWAs resort routinely to chopping off whole branches of trees, instead of trimming off the extreme edges. "Contractors are employed with no equipment to reach the tree extremities but use manual labour who clamber up the tree trunk and cut off what they cannot reach...So, the trees are left lopsided and waiting to fall, especially if their roots have been chopped off," he said.

Concretization around the roots is also a major contributor to the degradation of a tree's health. Coal tarring and constant paving leave the roots with no area for breathing or getting water, besides increasing temperature. Many times, due to lack of space around the trees, the roots are unable to grow and are not a strong enough anchor. Tree expert Pradip Krishen says in many of the fallen neem trees, the tap roots that make the tree stable seem to have withered. "The trees seem to have lost their tap roots because the water level had gone down so much that the tap root had become useless. Without an anchor, the trees are highly unstable," he said.

SOURCE

30th July 2009, Times of India

PRAYER ROW: EXTRA VIGIL SOUGHT FOR MONUMENTS

With the growing threat to protected monuments in the wake of a section people forcibly entering the premises to hold prayers, the ASI — under the ministry of culture — has sought the intervention of the Union home ministry for strengthening security at heritage sites. The ASI has become more concerned after a group people forcibly entered the Qutab Minar complex and offered namaaz last Friday. On Monday, Shahi Imam of Delhi Jama Masjid Syed Ahmed Bukhari blamed the ASI for stopping people from offering namaaz at the mosques located inside protected monuments. He said he would even court arrest if ASI attempted to stop namaazis from entering the Qutab Minar complex this Friday without tickets during prayer time. According to sources, the culture ministry has taken up the issue with the home ministry. "We have sought the Union home ministry's intervention in the issue. Often, we witness incidents like people forcing themselves into premises of monuments to hold prayers inside it. The ASI cannot permit this," sources said. Officials said that proper protection to monuments had been sought from the ministry after there were reports of large groups of people forcibly entering protected monuments like Qutab Minar, Jamali Kamali, Raja ki Baoli, Mohammadi mosque and other monuments in South Delhi's Mehrauli area to hold Friday namaaz. Sources said that ASI has sought protection to all monuments from Delhi police as well.

SOURCE

31st July 2009, Times of India

PROTECTED MONUMENTS GO MISSING

People and things going missing are commonplace but in what can be described as the mother of all "missing" cases, protected monuments have vanished from the face of the earth. In a written reply in Rajya Sabha on Thursday, the government said 35 monuments; all managed by the central government, and could not be traced. Delhi, the headquarters of Archaeological Survey of India, tops the list with 12 untraceable monuments. They now exist only in memory and history books. The reasons for the disappearance have been cited as urbanization, commercialization and implementation of development projects. Government said "disappearance came to light in the course of surveys of monuments". The reply also said, "It is not feasible to fix individual responsibility." The 12 monuments missing from Delhi includes Moti Gate in Bazidpur; Phool Chadar, Mubarakabad; Barakhamba Cemetery; Alipur Cemetery; Joga Bai Mound, Jamia Nagar; Shamsi Talab, Mehrauli and Nicholson statue. Uttar Pradesh with eight untraceable monuments comes second. Most of these monuments are spread over Lucknow, Banda, Hardoi and Jalaun. In Lucknow, the big monument lost is Imambara Aminud-Daula and many cemeteries. In other places, most of the monuments are cemeteries. What cannot be traced in J&K are rock carving of Sitala, Narada, Brahma, Devi riding a lion and Radha Krishna in Kathua district. Also lost is cave temple of Visveswara in Kathua. In Karnataka, a pre-historic site in Mysore cannot be traced while in Gujarat ancient site in Sejakpur in Surendranagar is lost. Haryana has lost Mughal Kos Minar in Faridabad and Kurukshetra. In Rajasthan, inscription in Fort Nagar and 12th century temple in Baran cannot be traced.

SOURCE

'WE WISHED TO SAVE THE RIVER, WE WILL HOLD PROTESTS'

Yamuna Satyagraha would have completed two years of its protests against construction on the riverbed. After the SC judgment on Thursday, the events were cancelled. Environmentalists were left aghast at the court's order. AGK Menon, convenor INTACH, said the decision had been most 'regrettable'. "The area where the Village is coming up is indeed the flood plain, has been so historically and nothing anyone says can change that. Saying it is behind an embankment and thus not on the riverbed only seems to be a convenient way of interpreting it," he said. Vinod Jain, director, NGO Tapas, said that the area of the riverbed and flood plain had been chalked out by the Central Ground Water Authority and unless it intervened or the Geological Survey of India redefined the area, NEERI can't decide that a part of it was not the flood plain. "The idea of justifying the Games Village by the Akshardham Temple is like justifying one murder with another. The temple should not have been there in the first place. Why even have the PM-headed committees monitor it," he said. Dr Vikram Soni, a research scientist with NPL, said: "there is a 40 m sand bank on the site which is a great recharge zone aquifer. In 1950, an embankment was made as a flood protection measure. The land on the other side of the embankment towards the river has been declared a protected notified recharge zone by the CGWB. This is the official flood plain and the sites in question fall inside it." "Our petition in court was to save the river and not against any particular construction. The high court judges spent several months judging the merit of the case, visiting the site and making an informed opinion. The Supreme Court's mandate was only to see if the committee that the HC had set up was required or not. We will now organize a massive public protest against what we feel is a very poor judgment," said Manoj Misra, convenor, Yamuna Jiye Abhiyan.

SOURCE

31st July 2009, Times of India

SC CLEARS CONSTRUCTION ON GAMES VILLAGE SITE

THE Supreme Court on Thursday put to rest all fears about the proposed construction of the Commonwealth Games Village on the Yamuna riverbed, and asked concerned government agencies to go ahead with it. The apex court went a step ahead and clarified that the construction -- opposed by environmentalists -- were neither on the "riverbed" nor on the "floodplain". Removing all legal hurdles from the Village's path, the three-member Bench of Chief Justice K G Balakrishnan and Justices P Sathasivam and B S Chauhan said: "In view of our conclusion, the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) and other authorities are free to proceed with the work at the Games site." The decision, eagerly awaited by the Delhi government, the Union ministries of Environment, Urban Development and Sports as well as the Games' organizing committee, overruled an earlier conclusion by the Delhi High Court that the Village site was on a "riverbed". The court said that the High Court's observation that the site was on a 'riverbed' could not be sustained. "The High Court disregarded and ignored material scientific literature and the opinion of experts and scientific bodies which have categorically held that the CGV site is neither located on the 'riverbed' nor on the 'floodplain'," the apex court's decision read. Justice Sathasivam pointed out that the High Court had arrived at a "contrary conclusion" despite the site's changed land-use, approved "way back in 1999 by the Yamuna Committee". The court said the National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI) -- an assessing authority of influences on the environment -- had allowed the DDA to use Pocket III in the area for "public and semi-public purpose". The Village is in Pocket III, beyond the embankment. In 2005, the Supreme Court had approved the construction of the Akshardham temple -- also in Pocket III and 1.7 kilometres away from the Yamuna. Providing a major leg-up to the constructions going on at full swing in the Village site, the Supreme Court also set aside a High Court directive to appoint an expert committee to examine and monitor these constructions. The apex court also said that the committee approved by Prime Minister Dr Manmohan chairperson and representatives of other departments, should monitor the work here in Singh, with the Lieutenant-Governor as its chairperson, Delhi chief minister its vice-

association with renowned environmentalist Dr R K Pachauri. The High Court on November 3, 2008, had ordered that a committee under Dr Pachauri check on the construction at the Village site. Aggrieved at the High Court's decision, the government had approached the Supreme Court. Attorney General G E Vahanvati and Solicitor General Gopal Subramaniam argued for the government.

SOURCE

31st July 2009, Indian Express

ASI TO WRAP UP 'TUGHLAQ JIGSAW'

SOUTH of Tughlaqabad, and once connected to it by a causeway, the fortress of Adilabad is not considered a "full-fledged city". It is considered a transitory Capital leading to Jahanpannah, the fourth city of Delhi. Built in the early 14th Century by Mohammad Bin Tughlaq, after the death of his father Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq, the ASI has chosen to work on Adilabad to fill in the "missing link" between Tughlaqabad and Jahanpannah. As of now, work at the small citadel of Adilabad is basically focussing on the outer fortifications. "Extensive excavation work needs to be carried out within the fortress but that has been planned for a later stage of the project. Since we have very little time before the Commonwealth Games, and a shortage of funds and manpower, we will do up the fortifications in the first phase of restoration work," a senior ASI official told Newslines. A replica of the Tughlaqabad Fort, Adilabad retains the ruins of gigantic ramparts. The fortress was also home to the famed Palace of Thousand Pillars, within which there was a huge audience hall built on columns of varnished wood. Towards the southern gateway, a vaulted corridor can still be seen, which used to be flanked by guardrooms. An amount of Rs 1.53 crore has been sanctioned for the short-term project, to be completed before the Games next year. Like Qila Rai Pithora, Siri and Tughlaqabad, on completion of restoration work, Adilabad will also be illuminated. There are also plans to develop a huge plot of adjoining land, which is within the DDA's jurisdiction, into a park. Migrant workers from Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh have set up small bases within the fortress and the site hums all day, as partial excavation to find the plinth of the bastions and the outer fortification is on at a feverish pace. The area around the fortress was surrounded by water but over time it dried up. ASI officials propose that if the land around it is desilted and rain water harvesting is taken up on a large scale, it will restore the ancient look of the fortress once again. On completion of this project, the ASI plans to take up Bijai Mandal in Sarvapriya Vihar, where Mohammad Bin Tughlaq had arranged for a reception for his father, during which the latter died. "Owing to its historical significance, we plan to take up this site and complete the jigsaw of the Tughlaq period in the Capital," an ASI official said.

SOURCE

31st July 2009, Indian Express

DELHI HAS LOST 12 MONUMENTS

RAPID urbanization, commercialization and development projects have destroyed nearly 35 protected monuments across the country that was under the jurisdiction of the Archaeological Survey of India. Of these, 12 were from the Capital. "Of the 3,675 centrally-protected monuments or sites, 35 are not traceable," said Union Minister of State for Planning and Parliamentary Affairs V Narayanasamy -- who also holds the ad-hoc charge of Culture Minister -- at the Rajya Sabha on Thursday. The disappearance came to light in course of surveys and "it is not feasible to fix individual responsibility," he added. Some of the missing heritage structures include the Guns of Emperor Sher Shah at Nasadia (Assam), ruins of the Copper Temple, Paya, in Arunachal Pradesh and Mughal Kos Minar in Haryana. Besides, eight monuments in Uttar Pradesh, three each from Uttarakhand and J&K and two each in Rajasthan, Gujarat and Haryana are gone. One monument each in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Karnataka, too, are missing as well.

SOURCE

'NOW, NO RIVER IS SAFE FROM ENCROACHMENT'

The mood at the camp is somber and rightly so. After two years of a bitterly fought, ambitious war against the authorities, the Yamuna Jiye Abhiyaan (Save Yamuna Campaign), is finally on the brink of being snuffed out. The group -- a coalition of NGOs and citizens' forums -has called off the two-year anniversary celebrations of the Yamuna Satyagraha (the continuous demonstration outside the upcoming Commonwealth Games Village) scheduled for next week.

"Now, no river in the country is safe from encroachment. Every encroacher of the floodplains will now quote this (Supreme Court) judgment to justify his actions," said Magsaysay Award winner Rajendra Singh, who is heading the protests. Apart from staying put with a handful of activists at the periphery of the Village site by NH 24, the group also undertook a 400-km journey along the Yamuna between Delhi and Agra -- stopping at villages to document people's relationship with the river. The campaign also saw feuds within, with many quitting to form their own groups. "Everybody, including the courts acted too slow and too late to stop the constructions, which had advanced too much to be stopped. The High Court reserved the verdict for eight months," said AGK Menon, Delhi head of Indian National Trust for Arts and Cultural Heritage, which was also one of the petitioners in the case. "It is sad, but we have lost the fight." The group has written a letter to United Nations Development Programme, which is supposed to assess the environmental quotient of the Games.

SOURCE

31st July 2009, Hindustan Times

CRUMBLING HERITAGE GETS A HELPING HAND

The Archeological India (ASI) has finally lent a helping hand to a crumbling portion of Delhi's history. Attempts are being made both by the ASI and the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) to provide a new lease of life to the dilapidated city wall of Shahjahanabad, adjoining the centrally protected Kashmere Gate monument in old Delhi. Often a neglected part of the monument, the city wall had been declared a heritage site in 2007. Accordingly, work was commenced to reconstruct it where necessary, and some of its crescent arches -- reminiscent of ancient Mughal architecture -- were filled. However, the restoration process was abandoned in the middle, and a parallel parking was created along its length. Encroachments had also sprung-up on both its sides. While the arcs on Nicholson Road side of the wall began serving as garbage bins, urinals, and kiosks selling refreshments and paan, on the other side, the parking contractor encroached upon and started using more space than had been allotted to him by the MCD. On June 21 Hindustan Times had carried a report titled "Is this history in the making?" highlighting the government agencies' neglect, which had reduced the ancient wall to a skeletal structure awaiting total collapse. Barely a month after the story appeared, both the ASI and the MCD have accepted responsibility and initiated action. "It has been 15 days since the process for refurbishment of the wall has been initiated. We hope to complete the work by July next year," said a senior ASI official. MCD spokesperson Deep Mathur said, "Encroachment removal action has recently been carried-out in the Civil Lines Zone; especially near the city wall. Unauthorized parking lots have also been vacated." "MCD has prepared an extensive scheme of improvement of road, footpath and drainage system of the area, with special focus around the bus terminal and metro station entry and exit points. A fund of Rs 240 lakh has been earmarked for the same," he added.

SOURCE

31st July 2009, Hindustan Times

ASI- IMAM STAND -OFF: PRAYERS ON M-G ROAD

THE stand-off between the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and a section of the Muslim population in South Delhi's Mehrauli area continues. A week after a few Muslims offered prayers last Friday in three ASI-protected monuments in Mehrauli, policemen stopped a group of local Muslims from offering prayers at Jamali Kamali around noon today. The prayers

were finally offered on the busy Mehrauli- Gurgaon Road, creating a traffic bottleneck for over half an hour. The Jamali Kamali mosque is listed by the Waqf Board as a mosque, but the ASI has listed it as a protected monument. "This is not a monument -- this is a mosque meant for offering prayers," said Abdul Hamid, 48, after offering his prayers on M-G Road. As of now, "it is our religious place listed in the Wakf Board properties". The Wakf Board, incidentally, has also appointed an imam for the 'mosque'. ASI contends the building is a protected monument and prayers cannot be allowed in it. "It will collapse soon if prayers are offered there because it is old," an ASI official based in Qutab Minar said. "We can't allow people to assemble in a monument." A section of the local minority community began offering prayers in the Jamali Kamali 'mosque' four months ago -- the number was meagre at first but it began to swell slowly. "They bar us from praying in the mosque but boys and girls come here to engage in immoral acts. This place had become a den for drug addicts and drunks," Haji Rous Mohammad, the imam, said. "The Quran is engraved on the walls (of the structure) -- they can't just call it a monument and let immoral activities take place here." The issue since become a contentious one, with a section of people from the majority community saying such "land grabbing" cannot be allowed. Wakf Board chairman Matin Ahmad said the number of Muslims in Delhi is increasing and members from the community should not be barred from offering prayers.

SOURCE

1st August 2009, Indian Express

WALL COLLAPSED HITS HERITAGE SITE

Ongoing renovations at the ancient Agrasen ki Baoli on Hailey Road received a setback on Friday evening. Portions of the renovated monument gave way around 4 pm when a housing colony wall adjoining the monument crumbled. "The colony wall couldn't support the heavy stones being used to renovate the monument," said Rishi Rai (21), a Hailey Road resident. "There should have been some other mechanism to support the structure." Being renovated as part of the Archaeological Survey of India's (ASI) plans to conserve the Capital's centrally protected monuments by July 2010, three workers from the site were injured and taken to RML Hospital, police sources said. "I was passing by when bricks started falling. The colony wall must have been weakened by moisture due to the rains," said Rakesh Kumar (30). More than two dozen bricks from the dilapidated wall fell on vehicles parked near the structure that dates back to the 14th Century. While one vehicle was damaged, another parked behind it was unharmed. "This accident is a major setback to the maintenance work. We were on schedule and would have been able to finish the work well before the deadline. But now, it will definitely be delayed," said a worker at the site, who did not wish to be named. "I will be visiting the site tomorrow to assess the extent of the damage," said superintendent archaeologist K.K. Muhammed.

SOURCE

1st August 2009, Hindustan Times

DENIED ENTRY TO QUTUB, 200 OFFERS PRAYERS ON ROAD

Tension prevailed around the Qutub Minar complex on Friday after 200 Muslim devotees were denied permission to offer namaaz in the mosque located inside the premises. After clashing with the police deployed at the site and neighbouring monuments following complaint by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), the protesters offered prayers on the busy MG Road, obstructing traffic for 45 minutes. Soon a group of Hindu activists also arrived on the scene to complicate matters. A senior ASI official said: "It had become a routine affair. After several complaints, we sought heavy police presence to handle the problem. From now on, things are going to be very strict at ASI monuments. We will check whether permission has been granted for prayers at these sites. But the government has made it clear that heritage monuments cannot be revived for religious purposes."

Almost 400 policemen were deployed outside protected monuments like Jamali-Kamali, Mandi masjid and Raja ki Baoli in Mehrauli Archaeological Park. Police was also deployed in Mohammdi mosque in Siri Fort. For the past few weeks, prayers have been offered in the mosques at these monuments. A senior police officer said: “We deployed four companies in Mehrauli area after government orders. The ASI monuments were sealed around 1pm and no one was allowed entry.” Barred, devotees lined up on the road outside to offer namaaz, holding large banners reading ‘To offer namaaz in masjids is our religious right’. “The ASI and police cannot stop us from performing our religious duties. Masjids are meant for Muslims,” said one such devotee. Amid the protests, a large group of Hindu activists also arrived on the scene, proclaiming that they would not allow encroachment of monuments in Mehrauli. Fearing a communal clash, police didn’t allow both groups to get close. ‘These are exactly the kind of communal problems that will arise if this problem is not sorted immediately. There are thousands of monuments under ASI protection and the rules clearly state that prayers will only be allowed only if it was recorded at the time of the 1958 notification,” said a historian. The Muslim protesters, meanwhile, said that it was their religious right to offer prayers in mosques. Zubair Ahmed Alwari, president of All India Mewat Vikas Panchayat, said: “We do not want to disobey the law and all we want is the right to offer namaaz in masjids.’”

SOURCE

1st August 2009, Times of India

PORTION OF RENOVATED MONUMENT GIVES WAY

Some portions of a renovated 14th century monument in the national capital gave way when a housing colony wall adjoining the heritage structure collapsed. Portions of the Agrasen ki Baoli on Hailey Road, which is being renovated by the ASI as part of its initiative to showcase certain monuments during the Commonwealth Games, gave way yesterday. “The incident happened as the compound wall of the colony which was apparently built using loose materials collapsed. The wall could not beat the structure,” ASI Delhi circle chief K K Mohammad said. He said the ASI will now built again. “There is no set to the renovation work. It will resume soon”, he said.

SOURCE

1st August 2009, The Statesman

FOREST DEPT RULES OUT PARK INSIDE RIDGE

DDA’s plans of converting the northern ridge to a biodiversity park have been shot down by the forest department. In a letter to the Authority, the department has said that the ridge is a notified forest where no construction activity can be allowed as such. DDA has only been given permission for “enrichment plantation”. Senior forest officials have said that while additional plantation in the ridge area is permissible, converting its status to a biodiversity park would enta “the ridge was notified as forest in 1955. We cannot dilute its status as that will leave the field open for lots of activity that cannot be permitted in a forest area. We will also be left without powers to deal with encroachments, etc,” said an official. Strangely, the notified forest has been mentioned as a regional park in the Master Plan-2021, based on which DDA had planned the Biodiversity Park. In 1994, the Authority had officially declared its intention for notifying the already notified area as forest. “The northern ridge is already a notified forest and DDA cannot supercede the earlier notification by wanting to notify it yet again. Despite what the master plan says, the northern ridge is already protected,” said forest officials. il some amount of concretization and movement of vehicles during the development stage. DDA spokesperson Neemo Dhar, however, clarified that they had no intentions of carrying out any construction in the ridge area. “We know the ridge is a forest area and we have already got the consent of the forest department for the project. In fact, the representative of the forest department is a member of the executive committee of the biodiversity foundation under whose

guidance this is being planned. Secondly, the objective of these parks is to preserve the flora and fauna and biotic community which have become extinct due to increased urbanization over a period of time,” said Dhar. The northern ridge, among all other ridge areas in the city, is important especially as it houses several heritage structures, including a flag staff tower, an Ashoka pillar, a 14th century baoli, a British era mutiny memorial and the Chauburja mosque. Compared to the rest of the ridge, this area is also relatively free of encroachments. DDA has been planning large scale plantation in the area and development of walkways that will serve as naturecum-heritage trails.

SOURCE

2nd August 2009, Times of India

PC AGAINST PRAYERS IN PROTECTED MONUMENTS

The Centre on Saturday underlined the fact that people will not be allowed to offer prayers at protected monuments even as the Archeological Survey of India (ASI) and worshippers continued on collision course over the issue. Home minister P Chidambaram said that prayers will be allowed only in the 12 structures listed so far. “We have made it very clear that such prayers in protected monuments will not be allowed,” Chidambaram told reporters responding to ASI’s stand not to allow Friday prayers at the Jamali Kamali mosque in Qutub Minar which led to protests. The minister said the Centre had made this clear when such attempts were made and law was enforced on Friday. “In the Jamali Kamali mosque, a protected monument, that (law) was enforced yesterday,” Chidambaram said making an appeal to people not to violate the norm laid down as early as January 1981 by former PM Indira Gandhi. He said there were 12 places of worship — five leading monuments and seven others where prayers have been offered on Fridays for a long time — where de facto prayers have been allowed. “In those 12 places, de facto status quo is intact. But in no other protected monument prayers will be allowed to be offered,” Chidambaram said. A group of people had on Friday tried to forcibly enter ASI-protected mosques in south Delhi to offer prayers but were prevented by the police.

SOURCE

2nd August 2009, Times of India

LEARNING TO BE VISITOR- FRIENDLY

Atithi Devo Bhavah. To make visitors to the city feel welcome during the Commonwealth Games, India Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC) is set to train taxi and auto drivers, CISF personnel posted at monuments, dhaba owners, hotel staff etc. Participants will be taught basic English as well as courtesy and ways to communicate with tourists. Delhi government sources admit that there is a shortage of trained guides in the city and with Commonwealth Games drawing close, the issue has to be addressed promptly. With hundreds of historical sites to visit and each monument boasting its own unique history, foreign nationals are often left to fend for themselves and depend on tourist books and brochures for information. Language is another problem. Quite a contrast to facilities offered in tourist sites in western countries, where trained guides — proficient in several languages—are easily available to aid visitors apart from group guided trips at regular intervals. Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) recently launched audioguide services in Qutub Minar in five languages and is in the process of introducing it in the other world heritage sites as well. Trained guides and guided tours apart, what is lacking, point out experts is that not a single monument or tourist place in the city has an interpretation centre where tourist can come and get all information pertaining to a particular site. ASI is also in the process of bringing out more brochures and guides for foreign visitors in the city. Much of the plans are in the implementation stages but experts say they are crucial if the government wants to promote Delhi as ‘a heritage city’. Various agencies like INTACH are also involved in the plans. “Visitor management is one of our top priorities and we are making more plans for it,” said an official. Under ITDC’s plans, etiquette training for the Games will also be provided to residents who offer rooms to foreigners under Delhi government’s bed and breakfast scheme.

“House owners will be given hospitality related training and a brief of Indian tourism scenario. Most visitors generally question their hosts on information about the city so they will be provided information on the golden triangle — Delhi, Agra and Jaipur as well as where tourists should go visiting in Delhi,” said an official.

SOURCE

3rd August 2009, Times of India

HERITAGE GAME PLAN CRAWLS

The days are numbered and the work is not even half done. Delhi’s caretaker of monuments — Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) — still has a long to go as far as restoring 46 selected heritage buildings in the city for the Commonwealth Games is concerned. Senior officials say 40% of the overall work scheduled for the Games is complete, and the rest would be completed before the Games deadline of 2010. The Delhi government is very keen to showcase the capital’s rich heritage to tourists expected to throng the city during the Games and has made several plans to that effect. World heritage sites Qutub Minar, Humayun’s Tomb and Red Fort apart, ASI officials also want to promote less frequented monuments like Tughlaqabad Fort, Purana Qila, Safdarjung Tomb, Siri Fort wall and the Hauz Khas monuments. On the cards is complete revamp of the selected sites including painting, facade restoration, garden development and minor repairs. “Estimates have been prepared for all the sites except Ferozeshah Kotla and Red Fort which are under process. Some of the conservation work has been outsourced to INTACH like the Lodi Gardens monuments while Aga Khan Trust is handling some monuments in Nizamuddin. The conservation work has been divided in two phases,” said an ASI official. Tourist amenities are a major component of the projects. In some monuments, they will be constructed from scratch while sites like Qutub Minar and Purana Qila require massive upgradation. Benches, interpretation centres, toilets, parking facilities, garden development, audio-guide services are all parts of touristfriendly plans for monuments which are to be in place in coming months. However, a lot of work is yet to fall into place. Parking facilities in the three world heritage sites is another area of concern. “In Red Fort, we are yet to get possession of the new parking lot from CPWD. There are already existing parking lots at Qutub Minar and Humayun’s Tomb, so we do not anticipate problems for visitors,” said a senior official. Another aspect is illumination for which 13 sites have been selected. Five monuments have already been lit, including Safdarjung Tomb. The monuments that were illuminated earlier were Purana Qila, Sher Shah Gate and Masjid and Subz Burj. Next in line are Feroze Shah Kotla, Khan-e-Khana tomb, Bara Khamba, Lal Darwaaza, Chhoti Gumti, Sikri Gumti, Biran-ka-Gumbad, Dadi Poti ka Gumbad and Najaf Khan’s tomb. ASI officials said work has been divided among various agencies but uniformity is a must. “The work is being monitored by us to ensure work is on schedule. For tourist information, we are coming out with a brochure which will contain data on all 46 sites that will be available in all the monuments. A website is also under development by Delhi Tourism,” said a senior ASI official. In a city which spans several dynasties, historians claim that each structure is a living testimony in itself. Bits and pieces from the Tughlaq, Lodi, Mughal dynasties and even the British rule can be seen all over the city. The Planning Commission has sanctioned a special fund of Rs 25 crore to Delhi’s ASI circle for upliftment and conservation plans for identified structures within the city. Delhi is home to 1,200 heritage buildings listed by INTACH Delhi Chapter out of which 173 have been listed protected by ASI. Three protected sites — Red Fort, Qutub Minar and Humayun’s Tomb have been bestowed the world heritage status by Unesco and take top priority in terms of visitor management and overall maintenance. In recent years, however, ASI has also shifted attention to smaller structures in the city — many neglected — and hope to develop them as popular tourist destinations in time for the Games. Approach road to monuments are also in for a facelift. Officials claim that beautiful buildings like Tughlaqabad Fort or Zafar Mahal lose out on visitors only because of their location where there are no parking facilities, no access route and encroachment is rampant. Then there are structures which people pass everyday without seeing them.

SOURCE

3rd August 2009, Times of India

MULTIPLE AGENCIES HOLD UP PROGRESS OF HERITAGE CORRIDORS

It was supposed to be the first heritage route in the city which would help enhance its historical status. But Delhi government's much touted heritage corridor seems stuck in limbo. The project was envisioned for the Commonwealth Games, to allow visitors to get a feel of the city's architecture and history, but even three years after inception, senior officials admit actual implementation is yet to begin. The plan was visualized by INTACH Delhi Chapter and an MoU with Delhi Tourism was signed in 2007. According to INTACH officials, the heritage route is very significant and is the first step towards getting Delhi declared a world heritage city. But while the idea is realistic, experts say a lot of ground work needs to be done and time is of essence now. Problems like the involvement of multiple agencies like DDA, CPWD and MCD has led to delay in starting work. "There are so many agencies involved in this project that coordination and implementation is a problem. While no agency has actually refused to start work, they all seem to be sitting on it," said INTACH convener AGK Menon. Many protected structures like Sabz Burj, Khooni Darwaaza, Delhi Gate, Purana Qila, Ferozeshah Kotla are all on the route of the corridor. Other heritage buildings of significance like Matka Peer and some Daryaganj buildings will also be enroute. "We are in talks with all the agencies owning these buildings about conservation. The basic idea is to add value to the heritage structures on this route and give more face to the buildings," said an official. "The area in front of Ferozeshah Kotla is supposed to be renovated by MCD, but four months have passed and not even the official contract has been signed. DDA is yet to start work at Coronation Park where the corridor will actually begin. For protected monuments like Purana Qila, we still require the requisite permission from ASI," added an INTACH official, listing the difficulties. However, additional projects like heritage tourist buses and nine walks on heritage routes planned by INTACH seem to be taking off. Museums and interpretation centres, all part of plans to boost Delhi's heritage tag, are set to be implemented. INTACH officials added that no major construction work would take place in this route and focus would be on making signages, increasing public space, repairing pavements, setting up kiosks; ensure functioning of streetlights and better horticulture. Many monuments along the route will also be illuminated. A plan to carry visitors in clean-energy shuttle buses along a model heritage route is also being examined. Just as in many of the world's major cities, the buses would allow visitors to hop off along the way to see some of the capital's sights that are less well known, then hop back on to travel to the next spot. Around 10 million visitors are expected to come to Delhi during the Games. The heritage route is to be developed with the help of a special grant from American Express and the World Monuments Fund. According to INTACH, the heritage corridor is just the starting of what it hopes will extend to other parts of the city as well. Eventually officials hope that the heritage route can be extended to far off sites like Tughlaqabad Fort and Sultangarhi's Tomb as well.

SOURCE

3rd August 2009, Times of India

DELHI MONUMENTS TO GET AUDIO GUIDES AHEAD OF C'WEALTH GAMES

After installing the audio guide system for tourists in Qutub Minar, the ASI has now decided to extend this facility to all ticketed monuments in the national capital in view of the Commonwealth Games to be held next year. The audio guides would be installed to facilitate the tourists better understand the heritage structure. The success of the installed has made the ASI to think for extending it to the other sites. Delhi has 10 ticketed monuments including the Qutub Minar and the Red Fort among others. The audio guides are now available in English, French and Spanish and there is a proposal to provide it in other foreign languages like German, Russian, Chinese and Korean, Muhammad said. The audio of a monument contains the history and other major details like heritage and it is very easy to operate and understand, he said

An amount of Rs.100 is charged from tourists for hiring an audio guide at Qutub Minar. Elderly, school students and groups are given a concession. They are charged Rs 80, he added.

SOURCES

3rd August 2009, Statesman

Should you have any comments or suggestions, you could reach us at

INTACH Delhi Chapter

71, Lodhi Estate, New Delhi – 110003

Tel : 2463 2267, 2463 2269 Ext. 105

Email : feedback@intachdelhichapter.org