



INTACH

DELHI CHAPTER

Weekly News Clippings – 118

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FINALLY, BADARPUR SITES IN FOCUS

Almost 15 years after Delhi government notified six monuments — three kos minars and three gateways — in Badarpur following an HC order, Intach and the department of archaeology have for the first time conducted a survey of the sites. According to experts, a survey within 150sqm of a structure is essential before it is notified, but in an exception, this did not take place in the case of the Badarpur monuments. “The Badarpur monuments were notified in 1995 after a court case. At that time, Delhi Archaeological Sites and Remains Act was also passed by the LG. But during the notification of the six monuments, only a site plan was passed and a survey under Section 17 was not undertaken due to hostile conditions then,” said a source. Survey of monuments is essential to map out existing constructions and structures to ensure no encroachment takes place in future. A similar survey was carried out in an unprotected tomb to be notified by the government in Katwaria Sarai. To date, 33 monuments have been notified by Delhi government as protected and will be awarded protection on the same lines as those under Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). With the state government identifying 92 unprotected monuments to take under its umbrella, a proper survey and site planning of these structures is essential. “These monuments are mostly located in villages and many of them are badly encroached. To conduct the survey for the Badarpur monuments and tomb at Katwaria Sarai, we had to use police protection, otherwise locals turn very hostile,” said a senior official. The department of archaeology, Delhi government, has prepared a list of 250 monuments to be conserved/ protected in a phased manner depending on resources and infrastructure under the provisions of The Delhi Ancient and Historical Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 2004. Out of these, 92 monuments have been selected for the first phase, including those falling on the route of Commonwealth Games 2010. “An attempt is being made to protect and conserve monuments in Delhi by signing an MoU with Intach. Since Delhi will host the Commonwealth Games in 2010, monuments are being spruced up,” said an official.

SOURCE

16th September 2009, Times of India

ASI IN THE DOCK

The Delhi High Court has sought a reply from the ASI pertaining to an ongoing unauthorized construction by the Naib Imam of the over 350 years-old Fatehpuri Masjid in Chandni Chowk. While hearing the public interest litigation instituted by a few residents living in the vicinity of the Walled City highlighting the irresponsible attitude of Government agencies, a bench comprising Chief Justice AP Shah and Justice Manmohan asked the ASI to come on record on whether or not the Mosque built by wife of Mughal king Shahjahan is a

protected structure. Seeking directions from civic bodies for demolition of an illegal construction recently added to the ancient building, the petitioner, Farash Khana Residents Welfare Association, has also pleaded for quashing of the allotment order of Delhi Wakf Board through which a portion of mosque was allotted to an organization named Nusratul Islam Society, run by Mohammad Muazzam Ahmed, Naib Imam of Fatehpuri Masjid. Raising questions over the power of the Wakf Board regarding the illegal allotment of a part of the mosque in the name of NIS, the petitioner said, "The DWB has no right or power to allot any portion of the mosque in favor of any body else. The allotment of the said portion has been shown in the name of a dead society." While seeking the ASI's reply in the matter, the Court posted the matter for hearing on October 10. Fatehpuri Masjid, made of red sandstone, is located at the western end of the Chandni Chowk. It thus counterbalances the Red Fort on opposite end of Chandni Chowk. It was built by Fatehpuri Begum, one of Shahjahan's wives, in 1650. The British had auctioned the mosque after the 1857 war to Rai Lala Chunnamal for Rs. 19,000, who preserved the structure.

SOURCE

16th September 2009, Pioneer

EXPEDITE DECISION ON JAMA MASJID BEAUTIFICATION PLAN, HC TELLS MCD

AFTER the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) informed the Delhi High Court that it has received the Delhi Urban Arts Commission's (DUAC) approval for its Jama Masjid beautification plan, the court directed the civic body to take a decision on the plan soon and start work immediately. On Monday, MCD told a Division Bench of Justices Mukul Mudgal and Justice Reva Khetrapal that the project had been approved by the DUAC and was being considered by MCD's Standing Committee. The Committee, however, could not clear the plan as its meeting was adjourned after BJP members staged a walk out from the House to protest the proposal to bring the civic body under the Delhi government. The High Court direction came following a PIL filed by an NGO, Cultural Heritage of India, and lawyer Varun Goswami, seeking a direction to the civic agency to remove hawkers and illegal shops from Jama Masjid area. The court, which will monitor the development work, also directed the MCD to provide a copy of the development project to shopowners in Meena Bazar, after they objected to some aspects of the plan. The MCD had formulated the redevelopment plan after the High Court, while hearing the PIL in 2004, directed the civic body to conserve and redevelop the structure. On October 6, 2006, the High Court approved all plans and the estimated cost for the project work. The Rs 1,200-crore Masjid Precinct Plan aims at redeveloping and beautifying the area around the Jama Masjid. The plan was first submitted to the DUAC in December 2007 and then it kept changing hands between the two organizations. On May 13 this year, the MCD submitted revised proposals complying with the urban body's observations and was finally approved by the DUAC in June. According to the plan, the 46-acre area around the mosque will be restored. The height of the area will be raised to the level of the mosque and created into a Mughal garden. A shopping complex is also planned at the same level as Meena Bazar. A new road and traffic management plan around Pardah Bagh and a fire station and related facilities will also be a part of the detailed proposal now.

SOURCE

16th September 2009, Indian Express

WAQT BOARD, GOVT DEPT SPAR OVER OWNERSHIP OF HERITAGE SITES

AFTER weeks of sparring with the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) over the right to pray at protected monuments, the Delhi Waqf Board is now on the warpath with the Department of Archaeology over heritage structures. The Department of Archaeology has begun a notification process of monuments that will ultimately give the 'protected status' to 92 heritage structures. But the Waqf Board has sent in objections, claiming that some of these structures belong to the Board. In the first phase, the Department covered 14 monuments but the Board claimed 10 of them as its property. They include the Tomb of

Muhammad Quli Khan, Baghichi Ki Masjid, Chaumachi Khan's Tomb and seven others in Mehrauli. Chairman of the Board Mateen Ahmed said: "Ten of these monuments were transferred to us in 1970. Prayers are offered regularly at these structures. If the Department takes over, such activities will be prohibited." "Why should we part with our property?" Ahmed asked, adding, "But if the Department wants to conserve them, they are free to do so." Thirteen monuments in the second phase have been notified and the last day to file objections is October 11. Members of the Waqf Board said objections are likely, though they are yet to ascertain which structures in the second list belong to them. On the other hand, government officials are not worried at the rush of objections from the Waqf Board. Additional Secretary (Art, Culture and Language) and Director, Department of Archaeology, Keshav Chandra said: "These monuments are significant heritage structures. They need the protection of the Department for conservation and maintenance. The necessary judicial proceedings will be carried out on the objections." The Delhi Wakf Board owns 1,977 properties in the city. Many have run into controversy over the years. While members claim some protected monuments under the ASI -- but owned by the Board -- can be used for prayers, the ASI is now strict about restricting entry to these monuments. They have even sought the help of the police to keep people out. "Structures where prayers were being offered when the ASI took them over have been given the status of living monuments. At present, there are 12 living monuments under the ASI. No new monument will be opened for religious activities," said K K Mohammad, superintending archaeologist, Delhi circle, ASI.

SOURCE

17th September 2009, Indian Express

ASI GETS NOTICE OVER CONSTRUCTION IN MOSQUE

The Delhi High Court has sought a reply from the ASI over the alleged illegal construction inside the 350-years-old Fatehpuri Masjid here. A division bench of Chief Justice Ajit Prakash Shah and Justice Manmohan had asked the ASI last week to submit its reply by October 7. The court had asked the ASI whether or not the sprawling mosque, built by the wife of Mughal king Shahjahan, was a protected monument.

SOURCE

21st September 2009, Tribune

LOST IN ENCROACHMENT

In 2007, when Parliament was informed that as many as 35 centrally protected heritage monuments across the country had gone missing due to urbanization, there was a big hue and cry. Twelve of the monuments were in Delhi. Two years later, the government - - to be precise, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) -- has not taken any preventive or corrective measures. Officials of the government body admit that no comprehensive survey or investigation of such sites was done. "There was no inquiry into the missing monuments, simply because it did not happen overnight but over several years," said a senior ASI official who did not wish to be quoted. Another query in Parliament had directly pointed to "rapid urbanization and development" as the cause for encroachment at heritage monuments and they going "missing". Legal battles are on over some monuments. At some other structures, unauthorized buildings have come up within the prohibited area. "If you cut a tree, it can be grown again. (But) such monuments are non-renewable heritage. Once you lose it, it is gone forever," said Nayanjot Lahiri, a professor of History at Delhi University. Lahiri is also an authority on archaeology of India. She suggested stricter implementation of the existing laws and more importantly, accountability. "The officials must carry out routine inspection of all protected monuments and submit reports. So, when it becomes a responsibility, any encroachment can be detected and removed soon," said Lahiri. Lahiri has several books and research papers on archaeology to her credit. Sohail Hashmi of Sahmat, an NGO that wrote to the Prime Minister recently drawing his attention to the encroachment at heritage monuments, said: "We are strange people. We keep talking about our rich heritage, but leave no chance to obliterate such beautiful monuments."

SOURCE

21st September 2009, Hindustan Times

AT 100, DELHI'S OLDEST DURGA PUJA TURNS GREEN

Starting September 23, the Kashmere Gate Durga Puja Samiti is set to recreate the magic in its centenary celebrations — from the unique craftsmanship that goes into creating the idol of the goddess, to traditional pujas, right up to the immersion where a bullock cart ferries the idol. Interestingly, the capital's oldest puja also happens to be eco-friendly. "As the city gears up for Durga Puja celebrations with pandals coming up in several colonies, the Kashmere Gate function will be an occasion of pride for all Delhiites as it will link them to a tradition that is 100 years old," said an office-bearer of the Delhi Durga Puja Samiti, which organizes the event in the area. The samiti is set to highlight the culture and tradition that puja pandals in the area have been showcasing over the past century. The tradition of celebrating Durga Puja started in Delhi around 1910. Puja was performed by ritually consecrating the mangal ghata, the symbol of the Devi. Pratima puja started in 1912. A year earlier, when Delhi was officially declared the capital of British India, there was a major increase in the Bengali population with a number of government offices shifting here. From 1948 till today, the Kashmere Gate Durga puja remains among the most popular ones and is thronged by people from across the capital. In 1950, Durga Puja celebrations reverberated with the sound of dhaks. In those days, dhakis were not called from Kolkata and locals played the puja percussionists. The joint Bijoya procession was held in 1952 for the first time. Prior to this, it was a part of the Ramlila procession. This year also saw the Kashmere Gate idol of Goddess Durga being carried on a bullock cart — a tradition that is maintained to date. The samiti is also sending out an eco-friendly message on its centenary. To begin with, the idol will be made of biodegradable material so that the Yamuna does not get polluted after immersion. In addition to this, the colours used to paint the idol would be vegetable dye-based shades. Non-biodegradable accessories will be removed before the final send-off. While clothes adorned by idols would be given away to the poor, flowers collected during the puja period will be preserved and handed over to an NGO for making eco-friendly colours. What was labelled as "an exception only for this year" in 2007, has turned out to be an albatross around the neck of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). This year again, two social organizations have been given permission to hold Ram Lila on the lawns in front of the Red Fort, a World Heritage Site. "There is pressure to give permission to the two groups to stage Ram Lila," said ASI sources without any mention of the source of "pressure". Opinion is divided over such an event being held in the vicinity of a heritage structure. The practice of holding Ram Lila in front of Red Fort was discontinued in 2002 and permission for the same denied in 2003 when the ASI took over the heritage building from the army. Conservation architect Anisha Shekhar Mukherji, who has done extensive research on the 17th century citadel, said: "Red Fort was always a centre of cultural activities. Why should the Ram Lila discontinue?" She said public activities should be encouraged in and around Red Fort. But they needed to be planned and organised better, she said. Echoed A.G.K. Menon, convenor of the Delhi chapter of Indian National Trust for Arts and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), a non-profit conservation body: "Purists might differ. (But) monuments should not be exclusives. Local traditions should continue while ensuring that there is no harm to the monument's structure." However, can these be called "traditional" Ram Lilas? The two groups started staging the 10-day religious event only in the early 1990s. In 2007, permission was given bowing to "political pressure". "This should stop. It takes almost eight months to restore the lawns and just the two events are enough to bring the efforts to nil," said Sanjay Bhargava, member of Society for Culture and Heritage.

SOURCE

21st September 2009, Times of India

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