



INTACH

DELHI CHAPTER

Weekly News Clippings – 143

9th March- 15th March

Editor's Note

Mughal-era monument painted white

Protest against road widening in Siri Fort

Squabble over heritage structures

Tigers, elephants getting pushed into 'conflict' zone

Govt gives heritage new lease of life

An incredible journey: Basti to heritage guide

There's hope for Yamunna

Restoration project for century-old heritage bridge finds no bidders

MUGHAL-ERA MONUMENT PAINTED WHITE

At a time when the Delhi government is busy sprucing up monuments in time for the prestigious Commonwealth Games, a Mughal-period tomb in Mehrauli Archaeological Park has been encroached by locals and its facade has been painted white. According to conservationists, the tomb is in the list of 92 monuments, identified by Delhi government's state department of archaeology for conservation and protection. It is unclear when the monument was taken over, but sources said it happened in the last few months. "The tomb has a very impressive structure with typical Mughal architecture. Now its front exterior painted white, it looks very ugly," said a conservationist. Sources said the monument is government property as the preliminary notification for the structure has been completed. It is also listed by INTACH Delhi Chapter as A in terms of archaeological value. When contacted, a top official of the state archaeology department said the department was in the process of taking legal action to free the monument from unauthorized occupation. "All monuments identified by the state archaeology department will be protected by the government. Final notification of these monuments is still in process. We do not know who is responsible for the vandalism at this monument but we will be visiting the site shortly and take action accordingly," said an official. There are indications this monument has fallen prey to extremist groups who want it to be handed over to the religious institutions. "The monument is Wakf Board property as it is a Muslim monument," said a person, claiming to be the caretaker of the structure. Government officials said monuments being taken over in the name of Wakf Board have become a common practice in the city. "First, there was the problem of prayers being forcibly held in protected mosques. The practice was ultimately stopped by the police. Then in the last several months, there have been incidents of unprotected tombs and mosques taken over by certain groups and painted green and white," said an official who did not want to be quoted. Mehrauli Archaeological Park is high on the priority list of the state government's archaeology department that wants to make it a tourist destination. Apart from ASI-protected monuments like Jamali-Kamali and Rajon ki Baoli, the park has small monuments from Mughal and Lodi Dynasty. "There are many monuments in the park area and if they are conserved and maintained well, they can become a big draw. It falls in the buffer zone of world heritage site Qutub Minar and people who visit the Minar will definitely be interested in seeing the park if it is maintained properly," said a senior official.

SOURCE

9th March 2010, Times of India

PROTEST AGAINST ROAD WIDENING IN SIRI FORT

The students of Kamla Nehru College (KNC) along with residents of Siri Fort Institutional area, neighbouring Anand Lok and Gulmohar Park on Monday staged a silent protest against the government's plan to widen the Siri Fort road and the adjacent August Kranti Marg ahead of the Commonwealth Games. The students also tied ribbons on trees as a mark of protest. "We think this 'Munnabhai' approach will have an effect on the government," said Mishika Singh, a KNC student. "The government wants to cut trees and widen the roads by making the pedestrian walkways narrow. "Pedestrians are already suffering and they want to take away the right to walk safely on the road from them," said Krishan Sharma, RWA secretary, Asiad Village Society. "Siri Fort road has five schools and two colleges. We need well-maintained walkways here," he said. "The authorities call the Commonwealth Games the 'green games'. What is so green about these games if you are going to cut down trees and damage the ecology?" said Arpana Caur, a resident of Siri Fort.

SOURCE

9th March 2010, Hindustan Times

SQUABBLE OVER HERITAGE STRUCTURES

Delhi State Archaeological Department and the Delhi Wakf Board, are at loggerheads over the fate of several heritage monuments in Delhi. Of the 39 monuments, for which the former has issued a preliminary notification for protection and conservation, the Delhi Wakf Board has raised objections over 25 heritage structures regarding ownership issues. The Wakf Board claims that these monuments have already been notified as Wakf properties, so the department cannot notify them again. "We have received objections from the Delhi Wakf Board for 25 of the 39 monuments," confirmed Archaeology Department's Surveyor Jaspal Singh. However, he refused to elaborate any further. The Delhi State Archaeological Department had issued preliminary notifications under the provisions of the Delhi Ancient and Historical Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 2004, for 39 monuments in July, August and September 2009 and January 2010. The Delhi Wakf Board has raised objections over the tomb of Mohammed Quli Khan and Bagichi Ki Masjid (both in Mehrauli); Haji Langa's Gumbad and a domed building (both in sector 4, R K Puram); Munda Gumbad and tomb of Shaikh Salahuddin Darwesh and Majlis Khana (both in Sheikh Sarai village) among other monuments, sources said. A Wakf board official, on conditions of anonymity, said, "These and several other properties were notified in 1970 under the Central Wakf Act. If any objections had been raised within one year of the notification, they were taken care of then, but now, these are identified as Wakf properties." "What we want is that these tombs, gumbads (domes) and mosques should remain as wakf (the granting or dedication of property in trust for a pious purpose) and not be used as mere monuments," he added. He also said that the Wakf Board wanted the government to allow regular prayers at all Wakf heritage properties. Government officials have started ascertaining actual ownership of the land, irrespective of notifications by the Wakf Board or by the Archaeological department. Director of the State Archaeological Department Keshav Chandra is slated to hear all objections at a pre-decided hearing date soon, thus paving way for a final notification of these monuments.

SOURCE

9th March 2010, Hindustan Times

TIGERS, ELEPHANTS GETTING PUSHED INTO 'CONFLICT' ZONE

Shrinking habitat for wildlife is making tigers and elephants vulnerable to man-animal conflict. As many as 31 elephants and five tigers have died because of this conflict in the past year, data released by NGO Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI) said. The issue cropped against last Sunday with two tiger cubs allegedly poisoned to death in a day by villagers in outskirts of Ranthambore tiger reserve. State Chief wildlife warden R.N.Mehrotra said at least four cubs have been wandering for the last four months in the outer areas of the reserve and may have killed some goats as prey. In retaliation the villagers poisoned two cubs

In January this year, a tiger was allegedly poisoned in Pench Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh and another died of suspected poisoning in Bareilly district of Uttar Pradesh. "Both tigers were victims of revenge killing by villagers," said an environment ministry official. Data with the environment ministry has shown that forest areas for tigers and elephants have shrunk by 15-20 per cent in the last two decades. India has 88 identified elephant corridors connecting habitats of 27,000 elephants, whose population is rising since 2000. "The corridors have shrunk forcing elephants to wander into agriculture fields. And, it has caused conflict in Uttarakhand and West Bengal," said A.N.Prasad, director of Protect Elephants in the environment ministry. The result of this has been death of 31 elephants and injury to many more. The wildlife experts, however, find a thin difference between revenge killing and poaching. "Last year, a water hole was poisoned in Central India killing 20-25 animals. It was basically an attempt to poach a tiger," said Tito Joseph of NGO WPSI. Problem of shrinking habitats is more in reserve with good wildlife population such as Corbett Tiger Reserve.

SOURCE

10th March 2010, Hindustan Times

GOVT GIVES HERITAGE NEW LEASE OF LIFE

Jama Masjid, Town Hall and Fatehpuri Masjid finally have government protection to save them from vandals or encroachers. Almost ten years after the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) came out with a public notice of 775 heritage structures, Delhi government on Thursday notified 767 structures in the Delhi Gazette under section 23 of the Delhi Building Bye-Laws, 1983. Chief secretary Rakesh Mehta told TOI: "The list has been approved by the government and the LG's office." Six properties from the original MCD list have not been included in the notification list as the heritage conservation committee (HCC) has asked for clarifications on them and one building (a hospital) has been deleted from the list. "Now that these structures are notified buildings, any alteration or repair work there will require the written consent of HCC or other appropriate body. Any demolition proposal for these buildings will require written permission from the MCD commissioner," said an official. "In addition, there are several incentives for owners of private heritage properties like havelis that have been notified. If their property is located in a residential zone, they can use it as commercial office or turn it into hotel after getting HCC's approval. This is subject to the owner agreeing to conserve the heritage character of the building," said an official. The notified list comprises many prominent structures like Mirza Ghalib's in-laws house, tomb of Razia Sultan, Old Delhi railway station, Namak Haram Ki Haveli, Firoz Shah's Mosque, St Stephen's Church, Sunehri Masjid, Gurudwara Sis Ganj, Bhagirath Palace, Anglo-Arabic Public School, City Wall, Shroff Eye Hospital, Jain Temple, Delhi Gate in Najafgarh, Northern and Eastern gateways of Chiragh Dilli, St Jame's Church etc. "Many of the structures on this list have more or less disappeared or have been vandalized in the last few years. For instance, near Andheria More there are the remains of a Lodi period monument that have been used by locals to construct another building," said a heritage conservationist. The notification has opened new avenues for the listed heritage buildings. "There is a provision the government may include new structures in this list on a suo motu basis after inviting public opinion and not necessarily have to wait for a recommendation from any agency," said a government official. Experts said this provision would cut down delays in the future. A heritage expert said even though some monuments were included in the list by MCD 10 years ago, they could not be preserved due to delay in notification. They said the capital has lost several monuments due to vandalism and encroachment in the recent years and in future if the government could notify heritage structures on a suo motu basis, delay would be avoided. Officials also said that avenues were being considered to notify the precinct of heritage buildings along with the main structure. Officials said there is plan to include more havelis in the notification as most of them have unique architecture and considered historically very significant. For this purpose, MCD has identified around 400 havelis in the Walled City. The NDMC heritage list with

141 structures in it was recently notified by the government. With both the agencies lists being notified, many of Delhi's most crucial heritage buildings now have legal protection.

SOURCE

12th March 2010, Times of India

AN INCREDIBLE JOURNEY: BASTI TO HERITAGE GUIDE

Eighteen-year-old Moninuddin was born and brought up in Basti Nizamuddin. But it's been just 18 months since he learnt about the area's historical and cultural significance. Moninuddin is one of 15 teenagers from the Basti who have been trained to impart local knowledge as tourist guides. After nearly two years spent identifying the tangible and intangible heritage of the Basti, the young people were trained to conduct heritage walks. It's part of a project launched during the ongoing Jashan-e-Khusrau festival here. The project, called the heritage volunteer programme, is part of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture's (AKTC) urban renewal plans. The teenagers have formed a selfhelp group — Sair-e-Nizamuddin — which aims to share the Basti's cultural heritage with visitors. They have spent several months studying Delhi's history, enhancing their speaking skills and learning English — thanks to the British Council — in order to be able to interact with foreign visitors. Those who have been on heritage walks are impressed. **Roots found, dreams take wings For The 15 Young Guides, It's Not Just An Earning But A Learning Process** New Delhi: Fifteen teenagers from Basti Nizamuddin have been trained to impart local knowledge during heritage walks as part of a project launched during the ongoing Jashane-Khusrau festival here. "No doubt, this is giving the locals a sense of pride for their homeland and giving them a new means for employment. Their involvement in these heritage walks has added a special, new dimension," said Farida Singh, who took part in the walk on Saturday with her friend Pria Devi. TOI went on one of these heritage walks through the bylanes of the Nizamuddin basti on Saturday morning. The groups were small, with eight to 10 participants, and were led by two young guides. They displayed up-to-date knowledge of each monument, a keen interest to ensure that every participant in the walk could understand the history and significance of the structure, and fluent spoken English to interact with foreign participants. The walk started at Shiv Mandir in the basti and culminated at Nizamuddin baoli. The one-hour walk covered Hazrat Nizamuddin dargah, Kalan Masjid, Atgah Khan's tomb, Chausath Khamba, Mirza Ghalib's tomb and Phoolwali Gali archway, which is the only gateway surviving of the original enclosure wall that once surrounded the settlement. The guides answered questions with insight and managed to keep all the participants interested. Spanish journalist Elisa Reche, a participant, visiting India to study sufism said the walk gave her a new insight about the history of the basti. "There is so much history engraved in every stone here. I am glad the local children are making an effort to share this knowledge with others," she said. Her thoughts were echoed by another foreign national, Hilda Lubig from Germany, who said: "The whole concept of the walk being led by young inhabitants of the settlement is an excellent way of encouraging young people to take pride in their roots." The local lads were themselves brimming with confidence and enthusiasm. As 20-year-old guide Nabir Khan said: "I grew up in the basti and spent my childhood playing in the precinct of Atgah Khan's tomb or near Nizamuddin baoli. But I never really understood what they represented. Ever since I became a part of this programme, I have been studying and reading all about the basti... I am proud to have been born here." Another young guide, Amir Ahmed wants to become an architect and is hoping that being a heritage guide can provide him with some financial help. "Apart from helping us earn our livelihood and support our families, we now understand where we come from and how enriching is the history of the basti," he said. "It is hoped that the walks will help people of Delhi understand the unique cultural traditions of Hazrat Nizamuddin Basti, especially the Dargah of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya and Dargah of Amir Khusrau. Some of the local guides also participated in an ongoing British Council programme for English Language training and some have now received scholarships from the British Council," said Tara Sharma from AKTC. The walks will be held on Saturdays and Sundays at 8 am and on Thursdays at 5 pm till 15 April, and begin to be conducted again in October.

SOURCE

14th March 2010 Times of India

THERE'S HOPE FOR YAMUNA

It's a river that has sustained Delhi over centuries – today it's gasping for breath. It has been defiled, desecrated and left for dead. It has been reduced to being a stinking drain and its sanctity and ecological significance will soon be the stuff of legend. Unless, of course, people join hands with the government to undertake the Herculean task of reviving it and infusing life into its water. This week, a group of dedicated volunteers under the auspices of the Art of Living Foundation will make a humble beginning by launching a citizens' movement for cleaning the river's ghats. You can join them in an act of penance and exhort others to do so. The Commonwealth Games deadline was never achievable for this river that's our lifeline. It will need faith and persistence to stay the course and ensure that the government gets all the support it needs in its endeavour to clean the river. It has pinned its hope on the interceptor sewage system which will bring results by 2014. Hopefully, it will reduce the pollution load in the river and take us one step closer to keeping the river alive. In fact, till Wazirabad – the point at which it enters Delhi – the river is not in such a pathetic state. This is where it is diverted into two main canals which take its water to various treatment plants for supplying it to the city. Having extracted whatever we could from the river, we mount a scandalous assault on it all through its 22-km journey across the Capital. Sewage and industrial effluents are dumped into the river by numerous drains that carry the city's filth. According to Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), Delhi is single-handedly responsible for about 70% of Yamuna's pollution. The river suffers because on its banks is a large city with insufficient sewage treatment infrastructure, poor maintenance of existing treatment plants and sewage carrying channels and no fresh water for most part of the year. The interceptor system is pending clearance with the cabinet and work can kick off earliest by July, say officials. It would take at least three years to complete it. Delhi, therefore, cannot expect a clean Yamuna till about 2014. Ramesh Negi, CEO, Delhi Jal Board (DJB) says this is the most viable solution to the sewage problems till the entire city is not connected via sewerage. In April 2001, the Supreme Court had asked Delhi government to ensure that the dissolved oxygen (DO) level in the water be a minimum of 4 mg/litre by March 31, 2003. Seven years after that deadline, large parts of the river in the city have no DO. Faecal coliform levels run into crores at several points, against a maximum of 5,000/100 ml, recording a high of 2,300 crore/100 ml where the river meets the Shahdara drain (June 2009). This indicates the presence of a massive amount of faecal matter in the water. This when about Rs 1,400 crore has already been spent in trying to clean the Delhi stretch. DJB, the implementing agency in the city for the Yamuna Action Plan, has planned an expenditure of around Rs 4,000 crore for the interceptor project that envisages laying of parallel drains along the three main drains of the city — Najafgarh, Shahdara and Supplementary. The parallel drains will intercept the outflow of all small drains that would otherwise meet the main drains, carry the sewage to sewage treatment plants (STP), treat it and only then allow it to flow into the river. "This includes an 11-year maintenance contract with Engineers India Limited (EIL), the implementing agency for the project. This way we are ensured of quality work," said Negi. There are those who believe that the plan is flawed. Ranjit Kumar, the amicus curiae in the case, told TOI that against an average flow of 2,100 million litres per day (mld), EIL came up with an estimate of 1,600 mld. This too was the dry weather flow and the monsoon flow was much more. "The maximum flow received in August 2008 was 3,400 mld. Out of 188 drains, the project also talks of intercepting only 107 which would mean that only 1,148 mld of sewage would be carried to STPs instead of 2,207 mld. DJB has accepted in court that only 71% of the drains will be intercepted while 85% of the sewage generated will be treated," he said. This is what DJB claimed in court: "It's a fact that even this project will not restore the river to Class C bathing quality and it can only be possible if adequate quantity of fresh water is released by the Upper Yamuna River Board." The biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) will come down from 41 to 12 but not improve to the required level of 3 mg/l. Negi says that till the time a dedicated sewerage master plan for the city is ready, DJB "will ensure that sewage is treated to a level of 5-10 mg/l of BOD, against the parameter of 20. All new STPs will be created with this in mind." Fresh water flow is not something that can be wished for easily. Rajendra Singh, India's waterman, says that in 1995 five states had signed a treaty to ensure that 10 cumec water from Hathnikund should be released into the river as 'ecological flow'. However, the city's growing demand and decreasing groundwater levels have left it

entirely dependent on the Yamuna

To make matters worse, the DJB-maintained pipe network is in such a poor shape that the city loses about 54% of its treated water through leakages and pilferage. “Delhi’s per capital consumption of water is much more than the average and most of it is being consumed by the rich. Water should be distributed more equitably. There is no utilisation of waste water either. River and sewer should be kept separate and treatment plants should be decentralised,” said Singh. The city does have sewage infrastructure that is not being utilised fully or very intelligently. Delhi has 40% of the total installed sewage treatment capacity in the country despite which the ‘treated’ sewage that enters the river does not meet standards. Common effluent treatment plants are also working under capacity, allowing a massive amount of toxic industrial waste to enter the river unchecked.

SOURCE

15th March 2010, Times of India

RESTORATION PROJECT FOR CENTURY-OLD HERITAGE BRIDGE FINDS NO BIDDERS

Restoration work on the Centrally-protected Mangi Bridge, a century-old heritage structure connecting Red Fort with Salimgarh Fort, seems to have run into a roadblock. After bricks from the inner arch of the bridge, located on the busy Ring Road, gave way in April last year, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) had taken up superficial restoration of the bridge. During the process, however, cavities were found inside the bridge and it was decided that conservationists with specialised knowhow need to be called in for the restoration work. The tendering process, begun in mid-January by the ASI, has failed to bring in any response. The ASI has now extended the last date for the tendering process by three weeks — from March 4 to March 23, a senior ASI official said. “No one came forward to bid for the project, so we had to extend the date. The project is getting delayed because we haven’t been able to find the right consultant to take it up,” the official said. According to ASI officials, there is no dearth of funds — an estimated sum of Rs 3 crore has already been sanctioned for the project. Considering the location of the structure, work on the bridge is also important in view of the Commonwealth Games. “Restoration of this bridge involves specialised technical work. We are looking for conservation architects who have tie-ups with international restoration bodies. The complexity of the work involved here is comparable to that of the Colosseum in Rome. We want the best architects to take it up,” K K Muhammed, superintending archaeologist, ASI Delhi Circle, said. The project has already been delayed considerably, with the ASI having had several rounds of deliberations with the Public Works Department (PWD) and the Traffic Police but failing to arrive at any decision. Last year, ASI officials maintained that overloaded heavy vehicles plying underneath the bridge scraped off the walls of the inner arch. They also cited the frequent road re-laying work undertaken by the PWD as a reason behind the damage. After the PWD and Traffic Police refused to lower the road level, which would result in blocking of traffic on the Ring Road, ASI had decided to superficially restore the inner arch. During the process, however, cavities were found inside the bridge and the work had to be stopped. “Internal cavities were found in the bridge during the restoration work we had undertaken. Special steel structures have to be inserted to reinforce the arches, which have to be imported from England,” Muhammed added. Over the last year, while the bridge awaits restoration, part of the road under the bridge stands blocked and traffic diverted.

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