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Concern over demolitions near Jallianwala Bagh

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TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

AMRITSAR, SEPTEMBER 7

The demolition of three shops adjoining the Jallianwala Bagh to widen the entry to the memorial has led to apprehensions in the minds of city residents that it might lead to the change in the original character of the historic place.

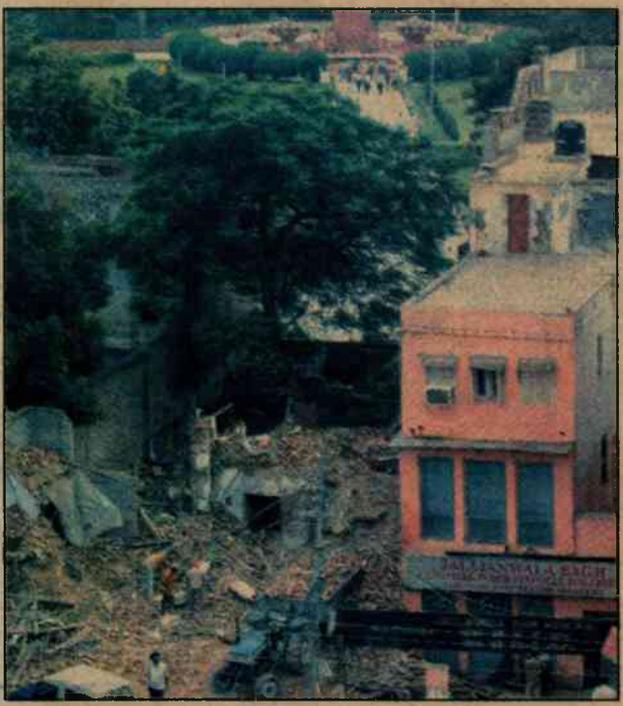
This has highlighted the need for the district administration to spell out the purpose behind razing of the structures which were no less historic.

The district administration had, on September 5, demolished three century-old shops and three houses in the area after the owners of these buildings lost the case and agreed to move out. The objective behind the demolition is believed to be the creation of a 1,000 sq yard parking area for the vehicles of VIPs who visit the Jallianwala Bagh memorial, especially during functions organised there.

Satya Pal Dang, a former MLA and veteran politician, who interacted with the shopkeepers in the area on September 6, said, "There is a strong apprehension in the minds of locals that the administration may bring about changes in the layout of the historic place just to make room for parking for dignitaries," he said.

"The fact that there used to be two more streets leading to the Jallianwala Bagh, besides the existing one from which General O'Dyer had entered with his men, but were later closed, gives rise to suspicion that there could be further changes made in the memorial's layout," he said.

Accompanied by his wife Vimla Dang, a former MLA, and Ripudaman Singh, former secretary of the district unit of the CPI, Satya Pal Dang met with the secretary of



The shops adjoining Jallianwala Bagh are being razed so that a VIP parking can come up. — A Tribune photograph

the Jallianwala Bagh Trust. "He told us that the work had been undertaken under a project of the Indian tourism development corporation. However, he gave an assurance that the narrow lane leading to the bagh would not be closed, as the trust had already taken a decision in this regard," he said.

Dang demanded that under no circumstances, the look of the historic place be tampered with by the district administration by closing the lane which finds reference in the history of the Indian independence. "Moreover, the district administration has already constructed a parking lot by demolishing a historic school in the area. The razing of portions of one of the most popular historic places, which is seen as a milestone in the freedom struggle, should not be the price for convenience of dignitaries visiting the place," he said.

The district administration and the Indian tourism development corporation should come out with the details of the project under which the shops have been demolished to lay to rest apprehensions about playing with the antiquity.

In November last year, Dang had protested against the move to demolish the 155-year-old Saragarhi school. He had demanded that the state government should initiate an inquiry to find out who were behind the decision.

Dang had urged the then Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh to intervene immediately to ensure the reversal of the government's decision to demolish the school, which had dealt a big blow to the future of a very large number of students of the school. Even trees, which were as old as the school itself, were being cut to make way for the parking in the area.

No change in old passage, says Admn

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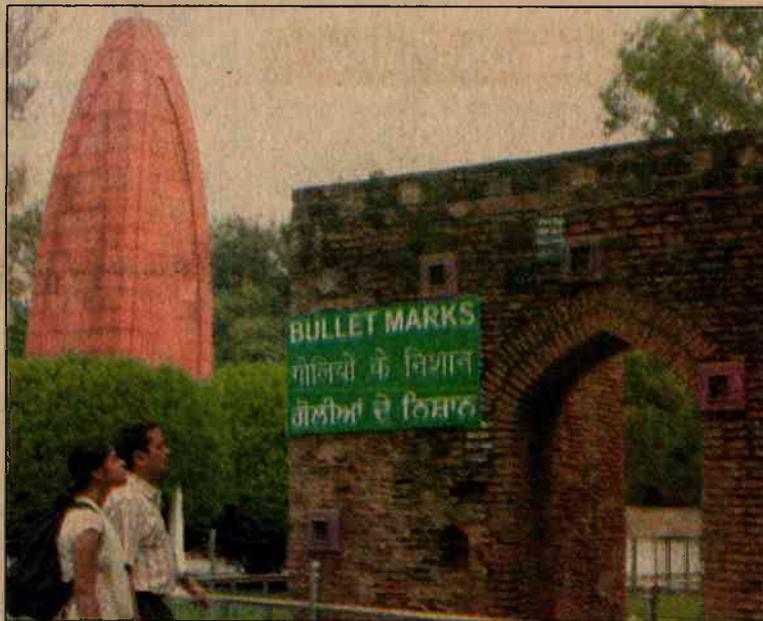
VARINDER WALIA
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

AMRITSAR, SEPTEMBER 14

The district administration has announced that the old passage from the historical Jallianwala Bagh, from which General O'Dyer had entered with his men, would be preserved at all costs. Being a national monument, the administration would not allow any change in the original character of the place. Instead, a beautiful information centre would be constructed at the site of the demolished shops, adjoining the old passage of the Jallianwala Bagh so that tourists could get information on touch screen even before entering the premises of the national monument.

On the other hand, the central government has agreed in principal to install much-awaited son-et lumiere (light and sound) on the pattern of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, before April 13 next to mark the 90th anniversary of the massacre of Jallianwala Bagh.

Earlier due to the callous attitude of all concerned, Rs 2.50 crore, sanctioned by the union ministry of human resources development (department of culture) on March 16, 1998, could not be used for a long time. The money was sanctioned for installing light and sound system at the historic garden and expansion and repairs of



Soon a hi-tech light and sound system would be installed at Jallianwala Bagh. — A Tribune photograph

the national memorial.

The son-et lumiere was proposed by Maninderjit Singh Bitta, the then Indian National Youth Congress president, to Narasimha Rao, the then Prime Minister. Rao even sent a jatha of 300 Youth Congress leaders to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands for a survey of the impressive light and sound programme installed there.

A report was later submitted by Bitta to Rao, who was also chairman of the

Jallianwala Bagh Memorial Trust.

On the other hand, notwithstanding the demolition of three shops adjoining the Jallianwala Bagh that led to apprehensions in the minds of city residents that it might lead to the change in the original character of the historic place, yet the district administration has announced that the old passage from which General O'Dyer had entered with his men and resorted to unprovoked firing on innocent Indians would

be preserved at all costs.

Talking to The Tribune, deputy commissioner, Kahan Singh Pannu said a beautiful tourist centre would be constructed at the site of demolished shops where tourists could get complete historical information about the tragedy of April 13, 1919, on a touch screen, before entering the national monument.

He clarified that the site of demolished shops would not be used for parking at any cost. It may be mentioned here that architects have already prepared a blue print for the expansion of the Jallianwala national memorial. However, due to delay on the part of the government of India to release the sanctioned funds, the plans could not be implemented so far.

The district administration had, on September 5, demolished three century-old shops and three houses in the area after the owners of these buildings lost the case and agreed to move out Satya Pal Dang, a former MLA and veteran politician, who interacted with the shopkeepers in the area, said the shopkeepers of the area were apprehensive that after demolishing the shops, administration could enforce changes in the layout of the historic place just to make room for parking for dignitaries. Dang demanded that under no circumstances, the look of the historic place be tampered with by the district administration.

30-day deadline for Gammon India to improve service lanes

VIBHOR MOHAN
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

AMRITSAR, SEPTEMBER 14

With the elevated road project becoming a nightmare for commuters, the municipal corporation has asked Gammon India Ltd, the firm which has been assigned the work, to provide proper service lanes within a month.

The Rs 173-crore project would provide devotees a shorter link to the Golden Temple and the Jallianwala Bagh Memorial. Work on the project is underway and an amount of Rs 20 crore has been already spent on it. A meeting was called by the new mayor Shawet

Malik on September 11 to do away with the inter-departmental delays. The superintending engineer (civil) of the corporation and Punjab water supply and sewerage board, executive engineer of Punjab state electricity board (PSEB) and chief engineer of Gammon India Limited also attended the meeting. "The officers concerned have been told to deliver a daily report. A review meeting would be held after a week. We are hopeful that the work would be completed within a month" said Malik.

Notably, the local organisations

have been repeatedly highlighting the problem being faced by commuters, who are forced to take long detours. The service lanes are too in a bad shape, resulting in repeated traffic jams. The haphazardly placed barricades add to the woes of residents. Also, there's no provision of lighting in the service lanes, making it really difficult to drive in the evening hours. Doubts are also being raised over the timely-completion of the project due to lack of adequate funds.

During his visit to Amritsar in April 2006, Prime Minister Man-

Elevated Road Project

mohan Singh had announced 50 per cent central grants for the project. According to the original plan, the project was to be funded by MC, Improvement Trust and Punjab Urban Development Authority (PUDA), contributing 60 per cent to the total cost. The remaining 40 per cent was to be borne by the state government. The project had also invoked sharp criticism from certain environmentalists as they feared threat to the heritage buildings in the area. The district administration, however, maintained that the elevated road would end near the multi-level parking which is at a distance of 500 meters from the Golden Temple.

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