

Delhi master plan in for a fudge

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: Tuesday saw a flurry of activity as politicians of all hues scrambled to get their act together on the contentious issue of closure of industries, most of them ready to consign the master plan for Delhi's development to the dustbin if it helped score some points and get some potential votes into their pockets.

The Prime Minister had at least two meetings on the issue. Chief minister Sheila Dikshit, whose government has been insistent on amending the master plan, met the PM and the President. The BJP parliamentary party as also the Congress had something to say on the issue. All the politicians wanted to be seen as upholding the cause of Delhi and poor workers.

By the evening, they seemed to have succeeded partially. Union urban development minister Jagmohan, under pressure from even his own partymen, said the government will consider a redefinition of household industries to allow certain units to continue in residential areas. This will not apply to polluting units, which are first on the list of those to be removed. The position should be made clear when Jagmohan makes a statement in Parliament on Wednesday.

How many units will benefit from this? There is no clear answer. The city government has been maintaining the number is over one lakh but its own scrutiny earlier had narrowed it to about 24,000. Sceptics say the redefinition will not benefit too many people.

The protests over the past few days have prompted politicians to come out in the open. A meeting of the BJP parliamentary party earlier in the day had official spokesperson V K Malhotra saying they were recommending the Master Plan be amended on two counts. One, to accommodate household industries which employ less than 10 persons and use less than 5 kw of power, and two, to permit more industrial areas, if necessary. But units which do not fall in the household industry category should be relocated in a time-bound fashion.

Malhotra took a dig at the Congress-led Delhi government, claiming its chief secretary, fearful of the apex court, panicked and gave a wrong order (on closing industries).

The Congress didn't do any better. Its spokesperson Margaret Alva passed the buck to the BJP, saying it had been in power in Delhi when the court case began and it should have moved to amend the Master Plan then. Nor did the party see fit to accept responsibility for the law and order situation, since that is in the hands of the Centre.

Letters

Not Hooligans

The Supreme Court has said that the industrial workers demonstrating in New Delhi were "hooligans" and has even equated the issue with the Veerappan fiasco.

I would like to point out that whereas Veerappan has blackmailed the government, the protesters in Delhi are fighting for their rights and for their jobs. We know that the government has allegedly cheated several thousand factory owners after promising them all sorts of things. Today however the government has abandoned them and has left them to fend for themselves.

The government is the "hooligan" here not the industrial workers or the factory owners.

K S Dabas, Delhi

Day Three of Capital punishment

By A Staff Reporter

Buses burnt by protesters
(AFP)

NEW DELHI: The ferocity of factory workers' wrath subsided somewhat in the Capital on Tuesday but was enough to lead to damage to about a dozen buses in east, northwest, southwest and west Delhi, besides requiring riot police to repeatedly lob teargas shells to disperse protestors blocking roads.

At least six persons were injured in sporadic rioting even as the number of people who have died in violence rose to three. Two of them died in police firing. The condition of two was still said to be stable.

Road blockades, which began almost simultaneously in several parts of the city around 10 am, practically sealed off areas around Vikas Marg, the old Yamuna bridge, Welcome Colony, Jagatpuri, Shivpuri (all in east and northeast Delhi), GT Road, Prahladpur, Daryapaur, Avantika crossing, Narela, Bawana (all northwest), Sangam Vihar, Badarpur, Deoli village (all south), Mundka, Mayapuri, Naraina, Dabri and Mahipalpur (southwest and west).

A blockade of National Highway-8 stranded dozens of airport-bound passengers, but the airports authority, with the help of police, showed a rather unfamiliar agility to press several courtesy coaches into service to ferry some of them under police escort.

Police vigil was heightened in northeast Delhi after a youth, Irfan, a worker in a Walled city-based garment unit, succumbed to his injuries received from police bullets. Another youth, Ajaib Singh had died on Monday. A 53-year-old businessman, Bhikuram Aggarwal, who was injured when a postal van hit him during rioting, also died on Tuesday.

But the toughest call for the police came from near the old Yamuna bridge, where a 500-strong mob emerged from narrow lanes and stoned several buses. Teargas was freely used to disperse the mob. Worried over the safety of DTC buses, transport minister Parvez Hashmi order the withdrawal of all buses from routes in the violence-hit areas, a move which severely affected commuters.

To make matters worse, a parallel agitation was launched by farmers demanding a hike in compensation added to the woes of people and police in parts of west Delhi.

Delhi protesters find support in Parliament

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NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court might have called them hooligans, but politicians are taking a more lenient view of people who burnt buses to protest the closure of their industrial units in Delhi's residential areas. In Parliament, some MPs took offence to the apex court's harsh words.

There was, of course, the usual party politics. The BJP implied that the blame for the havoc on Delhi's roads - and the issue behind it - lay with Delhi's Congress government. Congressmen, on the other hand, maintained that the BJP ruled the state till 1998, and also blamed the Union government for not moving on the proposal to amend Delhi's Master Plan.

BJP MPs like Madan Lal Khurana were vociferous in their support to the people whose factories faced closure. Khurana demanded a statement on the issue from his own government, called for an amendment to the Master Plan and said the Supreme Court should not have called the protesters goondas. He also didn't like the court drawing parallels between the situation in Delhi and the Karnataka and Tamil Nadu governments' handling of Rakjumar's abduction by Veerappan.

In the Rajya Sabha, where a longer debate took place, Congress MP Kapil Sibal said the people should not be punished for the fault of the bureaucracy, which had allowed the proliferation of industrial units in residential areas. Sibal, a leading lawyer, too didn't seem to go along with the court's description of protesters as hooligans. Between environmentalists and them, Sibal said he would rather espouse the cause of "those hooligans" because they were fighting for their livelihood.

He took a dig at BJP MP L M Singhvi, who took a more pro-environment stand, saying the member didn't know the world beyond the air-conditioned comfort of his ivory tower. At which point Union urban development minister Jagmohan came to his colleague's rescue, reminding Sibal that he lived in Delhi's posh Maharani Bagh. How would Sibal react if Maharani Bagh was dominated by industrial units, he asked. Should the government condone wrongdoing if it is done on a large scale?

Former Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar warned against attempts to seek short-term political benefits out of the situation, while ignoring the city's long-term interests. He asked MPs to go easy on their criticism of Jagmohan and the Supreme Court. "Delhi is turning into a slum," he said in the Lok Sabha.

SC raps Delhi govt for being held to ransom

By Our Legal Correspondent

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Tuesday took a dim view of the Delhi government's plea to allow it to slow down the process of shifting polluting and unauthorised industries from the city in view of the chaos and violence on the streets, and likened it to the Karnataka government seeking to withdraw cases against Veerappan and his men to secure Rajkumar's release.

Concerned at the plight of citizens as the Sheila Dikshit government and the police showed helplessness to tackle riots and arson on Monday, the Supreme Court rejected the government's request to go slow on the implementation of the court's four-year-old directives.

Referring to the "go-slow" plea of the Delhi government, a Bench comprising Justice B N Kirpal, Justice N Santosh Hegde and Justice Brijesh Kumar said: "This was the argument advanced when the Veerappan case was heard by the court. All that we had told the Karnataka government was to implement the law. But you (the Delhi government) want to direct lawlessness. Then repeal the Master Plan and everything will be legal," the court said.

When additional solicitor-general Kirit Raval on behalf of Union urban development ministry said, "We hope the abrogation of the Master Plan was spoken of by the court in disgust and there is no direction," the court retorted: "Of course, the observations were made in utter disgust." It added: "If the government had its way they would abrogate all laws."

Panicked by Monday's violent incidents, government counsel K K Venugopal sought the court's intervention. Quoting intelligence reports, the government's counsel said the situation was likely to "escalate" and with the rioters "planning to rush to the Supreme Court and Parliament, the situation may get worse."

But the court was stern: "It will not withdraw orders if hooligans take to the streets. You (the Delhi government) have hooligans holding the city to ransom. The situation in the city is such that anybody can take to the streets and hold the city to ransom," the Bench said.

Venugopal said the administration might be in the wrong to bring the situation to such a pass, but in the given circumstances it should be allowed to go slow on the closure of the industries as there could be more loss of lives. When Venugopal repeatedly made the "go-slow" plea, the Bench said: "Do whatever you like. We will hear the matter on November 28."

The court has already summoned Delhi chief secretary P S Bhatnagar to show cause why he should not be punished for not obeying its repeated orders since 1996. "We have only asked the chief secretary to show cause for contempt for not obeying orders of the court since 1996. Let cause be shown, we will see," the Bench said.

Venugopal said two million people, fearing loss of livelihood after closure of the industries, have taken to the streets. He pleaded that it was a matter falling under Article 21 of the Constitution (right to life and liberty). The court said it had passed the orders on the basis that "the health of the people is more important than the livelihood." The judges wondered whether health is not a part of Article 21?

The court pulled up the government, saying: "You created the situation as you deliberately disobeyed court orders and issued licences. All that we tell you to do is to implement the law."

Mastering

the

Plan

Bharatiya Janata Party member of Parliament, **Madan Lal Khurana**, is famous for literally "adopting" a cause and playing "leader of the masses". In fact, at times when he has not been able to make people see things his way, he has been known to walk out of office in a huff. Each time however, Khurana has managed to "adopt" some other cause and stage a come-back. Apart from having been Delhi chief minister in 1996, Khurana has served as the BJP vice-president and been Union minister for parliamentary affairs and tourism. Today, Khurana, the self-appointed messiah of the business community in Delhi, has once again taken to the streets. In an interview to **Smeeta Mishra Pandey** he accuses Union urban development minister Jagmohan - a member of his own party - of arbitrary action in ordering the re-location of polluting industrial units. Khurana feels this drive of Jagmohan is in open defiance of the BJP leadership.

came in. This has reportedly been done as a large number of bus operators who ply buses to these schools, often from Delhi, have decided to stay away.

BJP leader Madan Lal Khurana, a vociferous opponent of Union urban development ministry's no-change-in-master-plan stand, spent a lot of time on Sunday with the protesting groups. "But I have told them I can help them better only after the court decides the case," Khurana told *The Times of India*.

Several Delhi MLAs, too, spent the day offering their support to the agitation, almost giving it official sanction. Factory workers, estimated to be about 15 lakh, form a crucial vote bank in the Capital.