

# Green axe on DDA multi-hotel project in Vasant Kunj

By Rahul Gupta

NEW DELHI: The Delhi Development Authority's Rs 5,000 crore dream project of 12 five-star hotels near Vasant Kunj has been stymied by the Environment Protection Authority (EPA). The EPA has reportedly decided not to clear the project.

The EPA feels the project is environmentally unsound and the city does not need such a large number of hotels. The environmental reasons for the unfeasibility of the project are lack of water, location in a forest area and also that the area falls directly under the flight path (of the planes coming in or going out).

Chairman of the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) Dilip Biswas said the EPA held a series of meetings with DDA officials, Delhi Jal Board (DJB) and the Central Ground Water Authority (CGWA) over the project. "Though the DJB assured us they can supply water for the 12 hotels, we still think it is not possible given that they are unable to meet the present demand for water," Dr Biswas said.

He added that the groundwater table in the area is one of the lowest in Delhi. "Nearby areas, particularly Vasant Kunj, stand out for the scarcity of water. In fact, water tankers are a part of life in many residential areas near the proposed hotel site," Dr Biswas said.

The area where the Vasant Vihar Hotels Project has to come up is nearly 394 hectares, which environmentalists claim is the Delhi Ridge. They add that by virtue of being on the Ridge, the land cannot be touched. The Geological Survey of India (GSI) conducted a survey in 1997 and said that the proposed site is the Ridge. The GSI's findings were a shot in the arm of the environmental lobby.

Dr Biswas added that many parts of the Ridge are heavily forested

and in the rest there is a good scope for afforestation. "We would prefer developing the area into a dense forest instead of the hotels," Dr Biswas added.

In 1997, the Supreme Court in a judgement cleared around 92 hectares of the total of 394 hectares on technical grounds. The Grand Hyatt hotel is coming up on these 92 hectares which was freed by the Supreme Court. The Hyatt project is different from the 12 hotels proposed by the DDA.

Delhi's environmental NGOs — the NGO Forum for the NCR — forced the DDA to go in for an environmental clearance of the project. An Environmental Impact Assessment Authority (EIAA) was formed under orders from the Supreme Court which made it mandatory for all projects coming up in Delhi to get a green clearance. The EIAA, headed by Justice Shukla invited the DDA and the NGOs for public hearings on the project.

The Supreme Court again gave orders for a high-level body to rein in pollution. Late in 1997, the EPA was formed with Bhure Lal as the chairman, Anil Aggarwal of the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), Jagdish Khattar of the Maruti Udyog Ltd and the CPCB chairman as its members.

The greens had opposed the project on grounds that water supply and sewage disposal will be a problem. Also, the traffic in nearby areas will shoot up, leading to high levels of pollution. And that the hotels fall directly under the flight path. The NGO Forum for the NCR added that instead the area needs to be preserved as a forest.

The DDA has already started constructing a flyover in anticipation of the project getting clearance and the projected increase in traffic because of the hotels. The flyover is being constructed barely two kms from the proposed site.