

# DELHI

## Joint efforts pay off

A group of locals and environmentalists have managed to save the Bakkarwala waterbody

### peoplepower

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The united front presented by the locals and city environmentalists scored a major victory in saving a water body in Bakkarwala, West Delhi. The group carried out desilting work on the water body and also a plantation drive. On the face of the determined stand, the Delhi Government has decided to shift the proposed Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) depot to another place.

This was a first of its kind effort in Delhi where the citizens took upon themselves the task of cleaning and preserving the water bodies at village Bakkarwala. Led by well-known journalist Kuldip Nayyar, hundreds of residents gathered to participate in the drive. Nayyar helped in desilting the pond and hundreds of residents stood in line to assist in the process. Other eminent personalities involved were Vinod Jain of NGO Tapas and Prof Vikram Soni from the Natural Heritage First.

Prof Soni is a research scientist with National Physical Laboratory and has been leading the Save Ridge movement since 1994. He is currently involved in the Save Yamuna movement. After desilting, there was a tree plantation drive.

The gathering included people from Bakkarwala village and nearby colonies of Gurdayal Vihar and Chanchal Park. Besides, many NGOs, students and representatives of various campaigns attended the event. Some of these are Yamuna Satyagraha, Natural Heritage First, Tapas, Youth for Justice, URJA, Sangrakhshan, Students of University School of Bio-technology (IP University), etc.

### PEOPLE SPEAK

Vinod Jain of Tapas said that the legal position on protection of water bodies has been well laid out in the various High Court orders as a result of petition filed by Tapas. All water



Kuldip Nayyar (centre), who led the desilting and plantation drive with Vinod Jain (left) of Tapas and Diwan Singh (right) among others.

bodies enjoy legal protection, whether they are in revenue records or not. These water bodies in Bakkarwala should also be immediately included in revenue records.

Bhagat Singh, a local youth and organiser of the event, said that they would repeat the desilting work every year and maintain these water bodies so that the groundwater level in the area remains good.

Master Baljit, a retired school principal and incharge of

Yamuna Satyagraha Sthal, from village Samaspur in East Delhi, pressed the need to save the water resources of the city, which are abused in the name of development.

N. N. Mishra from URJA, a federation of residents welfare associations (RWAs), who came all the way from Patparganj, spoke on the need to raise support for such efforts and promised to gather support of RWAs for protecting the natural water resources in the city.

### ABOUT BAKKARWALA

■ There are four water bodies on a 26-acre tract of Gram Sabha land in village Bakkarwala. The land had been leased to DTC for a depot-cum-dumpyard to accommodate low floor buses. However, the residents were against it.

■ Thrice in the past, the administration had tried to take possession of the area but the residents thwarted it. On May 11, the administration came with a 250 strong police force but the residents refused to be cowed down.

■ The administration is now not pressing for the land. Meetings with local MP Mahabal Mishra and Chief Minister Shiela Dixit have indicated that the administration is looking for an alternative site. The matter is in the High Court. The Court had issued notices to the Delhi Government in May. The next date of hearing is August 20.

ANJALI SINHA / HT PHOTOS

## The driving force

Diwan Singh, an environmentalist, is the driving force behind the Bakkarwala movement. When he got to know about the upcoming DTC depot and the potential ruin of the water bodies in the area, he approached the people, especially the youth of the area, and instilled in them the need to save their environment. Next he brought in environmentalists from all over the city and a movement was born.

When Diwan Singh was coordinating a protest march, bringing together NGOs and concerned citizens against the depot coming up on Nelson Mandela Marg, he was fulfilling a promise he made to himself some years ago. "It was during the Kargil war that I felt that as a citizen of this nation I should make some positive contribution," says he.

"My involvement in the protection of the ridge started after I read the views of Prof Vikram Soni, in a newspaper article. The issue touched me and I got in touch with Prof Soni. For the protest march against the



The best approach to save the environment is to involve the local people. That works every time.

DIWAN SINGH

malls, Singh managed to get the support of people from Munirka and Mahipalpur Village besides students from Moti Lal Nehru College.

"If we do not act like responsible citizens soon our natural heritage will be lost. We should do it without any personal motives. The cause is always greater than the self," he says.