

Dear All:

Perhaps you read this article in the New York Times yesterday - these "poverty colonies" are all over Delhi, and other towns and villages across India - people living in shacks of wood and cloth, with a tarp or tin roof over them. Ashok Nagar is "a high-end colony", with brick buildings! The one mentioned in the article that was pulled down - **Sonia Gandhi Camp** - was a small one, just the other side of the JNU (Jawaharwal Nehru University) campus from our accelerator lab - I have included here a google map identifying the area. There are lots more of these camps on all sides of the campus with conditions far worse than the tent city of Oakland, for example. I also include a few pictures I have taken of these camps and people. My impression is that although they live out a miserable existence, they are quite proud and as honest as any other group. As I mentioned in a previous journal, they are lucky if they have a job that pays 200 rupees (\$4) a day. The road I take on the bus to the nearest metro station, Chhattarpur is also being widened and hundreds of these shacks have been arbitrarily taken down.

The article highlights at least a small step forward.



South east and south west of the lab, plus on the road near Vasant Kunj are more of these colonies, plus one between JNU and the SG-colony.



Boys live in shack behind them - on Tehri Road near Woodstock school



Shacks next to IUAC - of construction workers



The tarp roofs stretch back into the hill..



Roadside encampment next to IUAC in 2012 - now gone for road widening



At his doorstep



Daily deliveries - for sale



Three cheerful fellows

Illegal Districts Dot New Delhi as City Swells JIM YARDLEY, The New York Times, April 27, 2013

NEW DELHI — *New Ashok Nagar* is a typical crosscut of Indian urban chaos: Dust rises off battered, narrow lanes, tangles of telephone and electricity lines hang between poorly constructed, mismatched brick buildings. Sewage overflows from uncovered channels. And people are in the streets, in the doorways, everywhere.

What is also fairly typical about New Ashok Nagar is that it is not supposed to exist. The district, on the eastern edge of New Delhi, is an “unauthorized colony,” with an estimated 200,000 residents despite its lack of government approvals or full city services. Across New Delhi, as many as 5 million of the city’s 17 million residents live in unauthorized colonies, whether in slums, middle-class areas or even a few illegally constructed enclaves of the rich.



Shacks at Haridwar - next to the train, on the way to Dehradun..

Now Sheila Dixit, the chief minister of Delhi, the state that includes the national capital, New Delhi, has promised what amounts to an election-year urban amnesty program. She has pledged that scores of unauthorized colonies, including New Ashok Nagar, will be granted legal status — which could lead to new or improved sewer lines, electrical and water connections, and better roads — a change that could move residents closer to modern standards of living.

Possibly.

“We are on the list of authorized colonies,” said S. P. Tyagi, who has lived in New Ashok Nagar since 1984 and seen the difference between political promises that are made and those that are delivered. “But it is not clear if it will happen or not. There are some doubts.”

India is often demarcated along lines of caste or class. But many of India’s rapidly growing cities are also delineated by the legal status of where people live. For years, as migrants have poured into Indian cities in search of work and opportunity, illegal settlements, often slums, have sprung up in the absence of available, affordable low-income or even middle-class housing. Many of these settlements have grown into bustling districts more populous than many American cities, yet lacking amenities and legal protections, and residents face the perpetual threat of eviction.

This month, government bulldozers flattened a small slum in New Delhi known as *Sonia Gandhi Camp*, named after the president of the governing Indian National Congress Party. At the edge of a road called *Tamil Sangam Marg*, not far from one of the city’s wealthiest districts, about 50 migrant families had lived there for two decades. Many had voting cards or government ration cards that listed their address as Sonia Gandhi Camp. One city agency had even built a public toilet, though the encampment remained illegal.

“They asked us to stand in front of our homes,” said one man, who gave only his given name, Ramesh. He said residents were told the land was needed for a road project. “We showed them our papers and cards. But they did not listen. They started on one side and demolished everything.” An elderly woman, Rama Devi, could not contain her anger as she stood in the rubble. “They have left us on the road,” she said. “I wish they would go to hell.”

This blend of demolition and rampant illegal construction is part of the rough, pell-mell process of an Indian megalopolis coming into being. New Delhi is one of the fastest-growing cities in the country, adding 200,000 new residents every year, according to city officials. Yet much of the land in the city is controlled by the Delhi Development Authority, an agency under the national government that has been criticized for failing to develop enough housing, especially for the poor and the middle class.

“What happens to the people who come?” asked R. K. Srivastava, the secretary of urban development in the Delhi state government, who is critical of the national development agency. “There is no housing stock. These people are forced to live in shanties, unauthorized colonies and, shall I say, subhuman facilities.”

In the 1970s, the Delhi Development Agency took control of New Ashok Nagar, which was then farmland. The agency never took physical possession of the land, even as it doled out compensation to farmers, and residents say that some farmers simply resold the same plots to people looking to live in the capital. “I knew this was an unauthorized colony, but I did not have the money to buy in an authorized colony,” said Mr. Tyagi, the longtime

resident. A public school English teacher, he bought a plot of about 1,000 square feet for 8,000 rupees, or \$148. “At that time, even 8,000 rupees were too much for me,” he said.

Mr. Tyagi estimates that when he arrived in 1984, perhaps 5,000 people lived in the colony. “We used to live without electricity,” he said. “We made our own arrangements with candles or kerosene lights. For water, we built our own hand pumps.” To fend off the occasional demolition notices, residents began dabbling in politics. As the populations rapidly grew in colonies like New Ashok Nagar, local lawmakers realized that these colonies represented troves of potential voters and found ways to divert funds to provide rudimentary electrical connections, roads and other services.

Tapan Kumar Chowdhury, 62, a retiree now working as an activist in the colony, said legalized status would be likely to improve sanitation and local health standards through installation of a true sewage system. But he remained skeptical about whether the election-year promises would be carried out, noting that politicians preferred to keep colonies vulnerable so that residents remained more beholden to them for even incremental improvements. “They have a vested interest in keeping us illegal and unauthorized,” he said, “so they can use us as a vote bank.”

Or as a real bank. Merchants like Vinod Kaushik, who runs a small pharmacy, said petty officials routinely demanded bribes to allow new construction projects. Others said that the police routinely required payoffs, too.

Mr. Srivastava, the state urban development secretary, agreed that even those colonies like New Ashok Nagar that were listed to become authorized still had to navigate loopholes, like providing layout plans for official approval. Doing this would mean that every lane and building must meet city specifications, though code violations are common. He characterized the requirements as somewhat unrealistic but said the process was established under a 2007 national law. He said state officials were planning to seek the “relaxation” of certain code requirements, which could help illegal colonies like New Ashok Nagar pass muster but would also leave them with substandard housing.

“Where will the poor man go?” he asked. “That is the problem.”

Partha Mukhopadhyay, an urban affairs specialist at the Center for Policy Research in New Delhi, said politicians had made promises that were not fulfilled, but that this time the process seemed much farther down the bureaucratic track, a reason for cautious optimism. “Usually, it is promised and not delivered,” he said. “It is possible that this time they might actually go through with the regularization process.”

Hari Kumar contributed reporting.