

Parking over drain irks activists

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Another groundwater recharge zone will be lost. A project to cover a huge stormwater drain in Chirag Dilli for conversion into a parking lot has angered environmentalists.

The drain that starts in Pushp Vihar and passes through Sheikh Sarai and Panchsheel Enclave travelling right up to Ring Road is 5km long. It's under the purview of South Delhi Municipal Corporation and is part of a Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission project costing Rs 163 crore.

Environmentalists say that covering of such a large drain can lead to flooding and will impact groundwater recharge potential. As it is being cemented, it will trap noxious gases.

"Covering of drains in Delhi is a serious problem. It's absolutely crazy how the corporation is going about closing drains in the city. The first issue with covering the drain is that its groundwater recharge potential is lost after it is con-



Rajesh Mehta

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cretized. Second, storm water drains also carry sewage water which is toxic and needs oxygenation. If we cover it up noxious gases will remain trapped and the water quality will be extremely poor. It's a known fact that cementing of open spaces can lead to flooding. Why are we covering drains?" Manoj Misra, convener of Yamuna Jiye Abhiyan, said.

Closing the drain will eventually impact the Yamuna's water quality. "The polluted water in the drain loses its capacity to self-cleanse. This

leads to a build-up of hydrogen sulphide and methane," said Nitya Jacob, programme director, water, Centre for Science and Environment. Another practical issue is that manual desilting or unclogging the drain becomes impossible. "Anyone who gets in will die or collapse from inhaling noxious gases," added Jacob. It also makes the drains vulnerable to explosions from trapped sewer gas and flooding from backflow.

SDMC, however, claims that the project will not create a

gas-trap situation. "We will leave gaps at regular intervals and it will be partially covered. I don't see why covering only a part should create an environmental hazard. We are planning to landscape the parking area so that it looks pleasant," commissioner, SDMC, Manish Gupta, said. DDA's Unified Traffic and Transportation Infrastructure (Planning & Engineering) Centre had decided that civic agencies will no longer be allowed to cover major drains in the city as it is leading to clogging of the drainage network.

Another activist, Padmavati Dwivedi, wrote to the chief minister and the lieutenant governor on Wednesday about the project demanding immediate intervention. "Drains are being covered in a way that defies logic. It's threatening groundwater recharge and risking urban flooding," the letter says. CSE had written to Delhi Development Authority almost a year ago about the concerns posed by closing of drains. They did not receive any response from the agency.