

TOTAL CASES		HOSPITAL BEDS		Total	Vacant
6,33,542		1,176		9,053	8,135
DAILY CASES		RECOVERIES		DEATHS	TESTS
Jan 21	227	246	8	81,550	
Jan 22	266	319	7	71,850	
Total		2,060*	6,20,693	10,789	1,02,12,593

*Total active cases

Capital becomes garbage central

With thousands of North MCD workers on strike over salary delays, roads in several areas are drowning in filth, with no resolution to the crisis on the horizon

Business hit in Karol Bagh and Sadar: 'No place to even walk'

ANANYA TIWARI
DELHI, JANUARY 22

IN WHAT could lead to a health hazard, mounds of garbage have continued to pile across several localities in North Delhi as thousands of sanitation workers protest non-payment of salaries. *The Indian Express* visited Sadar Bazar, Karol Bagh, Rohini, Delhi Gate and Kanhaiya Nagar on Friday — in many areas, so much garbage had collected that the roads were barely usable.

Satish Kumar (51), a maintenance worker for the North Delhi Municipal Corporation who heads the union representing 4th class employees of municipalities such as safai karamcharis, told *The Indian Express*, "For the past 6-7 days, safai karamcharis are not working as part of the strike. For 4-5 months, they have not been paid, bonuses are pending for 2 years, there are karamcharis who have not yet been made permanent despite working with the MCD for 15-20 years. Unless they pay our salaries and figure out a permanent solution to this, this strike shall continue."

At the prominent Sadar Bazar and Karol Bagh markets, the filth has brought business to a standstill.

Chaman Lal (76), who owns a shop in Sadar Bazar, said, "No one can work without salaries but we just wish cleanliness is maintained — we don't know what to

do with the stacks of garbage in front of our shops. It can lead to an illness. It has been around 8 days and everyone keeps throwing more garbage on the streets."

Gulshan (24), another shop owner, said, "In a few days the pile will become unmanageable. The authorities must find a solution." President of the Sadar Bazar traders association, Paramjeet Singh Pamma, said customer footfall has dropped drastically as a result.

Naveen Keshwani (41), who runs a shoe store at Karol Bagh, said, "We can't even walk on the road; the smell is so bad. Karol Bagh market was once a tourist spot and now it looks like this."

Jai Prakash, mayor of North MCD and the councillor of Sadar Bazar, said, "Today we cleared 2 months' worth of salaries to safai karamcharis, worth approximately Rs 154 crores." Urging sanitation workers to resume work, he said: "This is the capital of the country, and I appeal to the workers to go back to work. We are working on a permanent solution... and even the Delhi High Court is hearing the matter. We shall clear as many dues as possible of all employees by the end of the month."

But A P Khan, convener of the Confederation of MCD Employees' Union, drew a hard line: "Till they release salaries of all employees, including pensioners, and find a permanent solution, the strike will continue."

KANHAIYA NAGAR



SADAR BAZAR



GHANTA GHAR



KAROL BAGH MARKET



KAROL BAGH



LOK NAYAK HOSPITAL



Garbage piled up in different parts of the city Friday as civic workers continued their strike. Photos: Prem Nath Pandey

Behind cycle of salary delays: MCD structure, 2 parties at loggerheads

MALLICA JOSHI & ABHINAV RAJPUT
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 22

TRIFURCATION DATING back a decade, polls slated for next year and the BJP and AAP vying for control — these are some of the key reasons why Delhi's municipal workers are facing salary delays, and why filth has accumulated on the city's roads over the past weeks.

With hundreds of MCD employees going without salaries and former employees without pension, the Delhi High Court Thursday noted that their grievances had been reduced to a "political slugfest", and expressed "disgust" with the Delhi government and the corporations. It also ordered the Delhi government to pay any amount deducted or adjusted if during the pandemic from funds to be released to the corporations, within two weeks.

The fight between the Delhi

government and MCDs, in court and outside, is not new — MCD employees have approached the court over non-payment of salaries in 2018, 2019 and 2020.

The 2012 trifurcation

Trifurcation of the erstwhile Municipal Corporation of Delhi in 2012 was done to "decentralise" the large local body. However, senior officials say, it was also an attempt to fix political boundaries in such a way that the then Congress government in Delhi would be able to make inroads into the civic body which had become a BJP bastion.

After the trifurcation, the North and South Delhi Municipal Corporations were given 104 wards each, while the East MCD had 64, mostly in the trans-Yamuna area. Due to Delhi's demography, the South body ended

up with the most "posh" colonies — the A and B category taxation zones that paid higher property taxes. The North, on the other hand, got more unauthorised and lower taxation category colonies, which pay less tax, or not at all.

The split created a structure in which the South ended up earning around 30% of its internal revenue through property tax. For the North corporation, the share of internal revenue through property tax was around 15%, while for the East body, this figure was even lower at around 9%.

The Covid crisis

Because of the pandemic, both Delhi government and MCDs have suffered in terms of internal revenue collection. According to Delhi government officials, its revenue is at least 40%



At Karol Bagh Friday. Ananya Tiwari

lower than what it was last year. Corporations too have seen a more than 50% shortage in collection from advertising revenues, toll tax, health trade license and other sources of revenue.

The corporations earn the highest amount from property tax collections which too has

been affected, with South MCD collection being 20% less while the figure stands at 40% for East and North, senior officials said. In the city, several roles — sometimes referred to as cradle to grave — are fulfilled by corporations. Birth and death certificates, primary education (along

with Delhi government), health-care, maintenance of smaller roads, property tax, cleaning of roads, garbage disposal etc fall under their purview. But with a fall in revenue and amid a tussle with the Delhi government, officials say corporations are finding it hard to perform all their duties.

The politics

The tussle between AAP, which heads the state, and BJP, which heads the three MCDs, has meant there is little room for co-operation. The funding structure for corporations has remained the same for decades, but Sheila Dikshit's Congress government did not have a confrontational relationship with the Centre or the corporations, which have been ruled by BJP for the past 14 years.

The AAP, which wants to wrest control of the three civic bodies next year, has alleged corruption and financial irregularities in MCDs, which it says is the reason for the financial crunch. The BJP

maintains the Delhi government is withholding funds it is bound to pay the three MCDs, which is why salaries have been delayed.

Delhi, being a Union Territory with special powers, has a unique administrative structure where civic bodies do not come under direct control of the state government, but rather under the Centre. The Centre's grants to municipal bodies come under specific grants for projects, while Delhi government is supposed to pay a certain amount to the MCDs.

The state of play

According to a sanction order of Delhi government's department of urban development, from Wednesday, the corporations were owed around Rs 1,200 crore as per revised estimates with a 42% revenue decline under the basic tax assignment. Of this, Rs 862 crore had been released until December.

The Delhi government told the Delhi High Court that a sanc-

tion order was passed on Wednesday for release of Rs 337 crore to the MCDs and other local bodies for January-March 2021.

MCD officials say their calculations under the 3rd Financial Commission shows that between 2012 and 2016, Delhi government had to pay South MCD Rs 428 crore; the North was owed Rs 539 crore; while East had no due.

Similarly, the figures given by the three MCDs state that under 5th Finance Commission recommendations between 2016 and 2021, South is owed Rs 1,901 crore; East is owed Rs 1,624; and North is owed Rs 1,087 crore.

In a letter to the three MCD mayors in October, Sisodia had said, "It is clear that no major amount is due from Delhi government, and any figure the Mayors of MCDs are demanding is fictional and an attempt to divert the attention of public from the deep financial mismanagement and corruption inside the MCDs."

Three baolis set to get a fresh lease of life

SHIVAMPATEL
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 22

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL Survey of India has asked Delhi Jal Board to rejuvenate 12 water bodies, including Agrasen ki Baoli, Red Fort Baoli and Purana Qila Baoli.

A report containing details of the plan was submitted to the National Green Tribunal Wednesday by a monitoring committee headed by retired Delhi HC judge Justice SP Garg.

A no-objection certificate for rejuvenation of three water bodies under the ASI has already been issued to the DJB in September, the report stated.

"After much persuasion by the monitoring committee, it was agreed by the ASI that they will issue NOC to DJB for rejuvenation of water bodies as it (ASI) has no expertise of its own to rejuvenate them," the report said.

In December, the ASI had sought a proposal on the plan from the DJB chief executive officer. On December 16, a list of 12 water bodies was sent to the

Board and ASI asked for a detailed project report (DPR) on them, as per the report.

A DJB official said, "We have taken up three ASI water bodies — two at Tughlaqabad and one at Mehrauli — for rejuvenation at present. The ASI requested us to take up the others but we have not consented yet." An ASI official confirmed three NOCs have been issued to the DJB.

Among the 12 water bodies in the list are Gandhak ki Baoli and Rajon ki Baoli in Mehrauli, two Baolis at the Tughlaqabad Fort, Hazrat Nizamuddin Baoli and Arab ki Sarai in Nizamuddin, Feroz Shah Kotla Baoli, Hindu Rao Baoli and a Baoli at Wazirabad Gumbad in RK Puram, as per the report.

The Monitoring Committee report said, "After receipt of DPR of remaining water bodies, ASI would issue NOC for their revival... (DJB informed) that work at one water body... is under execution. Proposal for the second water body has been received... is at tender stage. Proposal of the third water body is yet to be received..."

Ahead of R-Day protest, farmers firm: 'Makes no sense to turn back now'

ASHNA BUTANI
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 22

WITH FARMER unions rejecting the Centre's offer to keep the new farm laws in abeyance for 18 months, many farmers at the Singhu border said their movement would be "futile" if they turn back now, especially with thousands more expected to join them by Republic Day.

Jang Singh (73), a farmer from Ambala in Haryana who has been at the Singhu border since the protest began, conceded that "the government's offer to keep the laws in cold storage is definitely a win for us", but added that "we will not go anywhere until the laws are repealed... even if that means we have to stay for a few months".

Singh, whose children and grandchildren are also at the protest site now, said he has helpers to take care of his fields back home.

Affiliated to the Bharatiya



A protester at Singhu Friday. Abhinav Saha

Kisan Union, he said many more farmers from his district are leaving their homes to be a part of the march on January 26.

Harsh Gill (18), also from Ambala, said, "We cannot go back without a written guarantee that the laws will be repealed."

While some said that they go home from time to time to tend

to their fields, almost all said they will not stop protesting.

Gill said, "To fight the cold, we keep eating dry fruits and pinni that keep us warm. Our clothes are getting washed as there is a laundry service. We sleep well at night. Why will we leave until all our demands are met?"

Harjinder Singh (38), a

farmer from Hoshiarpur in Punjab who is affiliated to the Doaba Kisan Sangharsh Committee, said the government needs to repeal the laws. "We have come so far, there is no point returning home now."

Four people from his 21-member family are at the protest site, said Harjinder, adding that his wife and children visit on the weekends.

Hardeep Kaur (62) from Ludhiana, a member of the All India Kisan Mahasabha, said more women will also join the protest soon. "Our fathers and mothers who have been part of the freedom struggle have seen much worse than this. We draw inspiration from them and continue to fight for our rights here."

At Ghazipur, Haseeb Ahmed (40), a farmer from Uttar Pradesh's Rampur who is associated with the Bharatiya Kisan Union, said, "The government thought we would go back. But it is quite the opposite. We are now preparing to march to Delhi on January 26."

FIR against Sirsa over gurdwara fund 'misuse'

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 22

THE DELHI Police's Economic Offences Wing has registered an FIR against Shiromani Akali Dal leader Manjinder Singh Sirsa for alleged cheating and misappropriation of funds of the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC) while he was its secretary-general.

Sirsa, when contacted, said he was being targeted for supporting the farmers' protest.

An FIR was lodged on Thursday evening based on a complaint filed by Bhupender Singh from Rakab Ganj Gurdwara.

In the FIR, Bhupender Singh said he is "one of the stakeholders in the funds received by DSGMC" and that Sirsa had allegedly embezzled money through the bogus purchase of tents, blankets and tarps worth Rs 1 crore.

"The accused made the purchase of the items from non-existing sham companies,"

claimed Bhupender Singh in his complaint.

The FIR also claims that Sirsa along with his personal assistant Narinder Singh misappropriated funds by not purchasing ACs and water coolers from authorised dealers but from a company owned by Narinder's brother. "They also took out cash from the chest of the Gurdwara Committee for personal use," claims the complaint.

A senior officer from the EOW said, "We are verifying the claims and looking into the allegations. The complainant has submitted some bills and documents. We are investigating the matter."

Sirsa said, "The case has been going on for two years in court. Last year, police themselves told the judge to remove my name from the case because there was no evidence. Now, they are filing a case against me. Both Delhi and UP Police are targeting me for supporting farmers in their protest against farm laws."