

grandeur of
Taj Mahal is
threatened
by the
construction of
Taj Heritage
Corridor, a
massive
shopping
complex in the
backdrop of this
wonder

By Rizvi Syed
Haider Abbas

How my tea

*Ikk shahenshah ne banwa
ke haseen taj mahal
Sari dunya ko mohabbat
ki nishani di hai*
(An Emperor built this
beautiful Taj Mahal
And gifted it to the world as
a symbol of love)

Imagine how Shakeel Badayuni, who wrote these lines, may have reacted to the irreparable loss done to this monument of love, India's premier tourist attraction.

The Uttar Pradesh government is all to be blamed for filling the two-kilometer stretch of Yamuna-bed with a five feet base of soil — to build the Taj Heritage Corridor, a massive shopping complex in the backdrop of Taj Mahal. Tractors ferrying soil and 800 labourers were deployed for the purpose for many days.

The issue came to light after the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) member secretary B. Sengupta sent an angry letter to the ministry of environment, pointing out the environmental hazards if the flow of Yamuna water was disturbed. "The filling of the river bed will affect the natural flow of river and the natural flood plain," he wrote in the letter.

Surprisingly, the UP government grandiose project of building Taj Heritage Corridor to link Taj Mahal, Agra

heritage

Fort, Rambagh and Chinni-karauza was going on unnoticed by media since November last year. And now the Agra Development Authority (ADA), Agra Municipal Corporation (AMC), Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) are readily washing their hands off it.

Even more surprising is the total apathy on part of the state government. The project was given to National Project Construction Corporation (NPCC) and was under the care of Mission Management Board (MMB) set up at the state level, headed by principal secretary of the UP government, and Uttar Pradesh Pollution Control Board (UPPCB). But obviously neither of them found it fit to conduct an Environmental Impact Analysis (EIA) of the entire project.

Secretary Environment of UP, R K Sharma, went a step forward. He said: "there was no need for an EIA as it was not an industrial project," and denied the filling of Yamuna-bed. According to him it was just another allegation by media.

Union Tourism and Environment Minister Jagmohan acted on the weak-

ness of Taj Mahal) yet it capably ruined the surrounding ambience. After a two-hour long meeting with the UP environment secretary, Jagmohan wrote a letter to the UP Chief Minister Mayawati listing the various provisions of law which have been flouted; like no proper clearance from ADA, AMC, CPCB etc. ASI too has lodged a formal complaint with Agra police over unauthorised construction.

What came as bit of a relief was the announcement by Jagmohan that UNESCO has not threatened to withdraw Taj Mahal from its World Heritage List.

Uttar Pradesh government jumped to take some belated damage control measures. Its Principal Secretary P L Punia said that Chief Minister Mayawati had personally sought a detailed report of the project. He added that construction work was halted by the state government and was not ordered by Jagmohan.

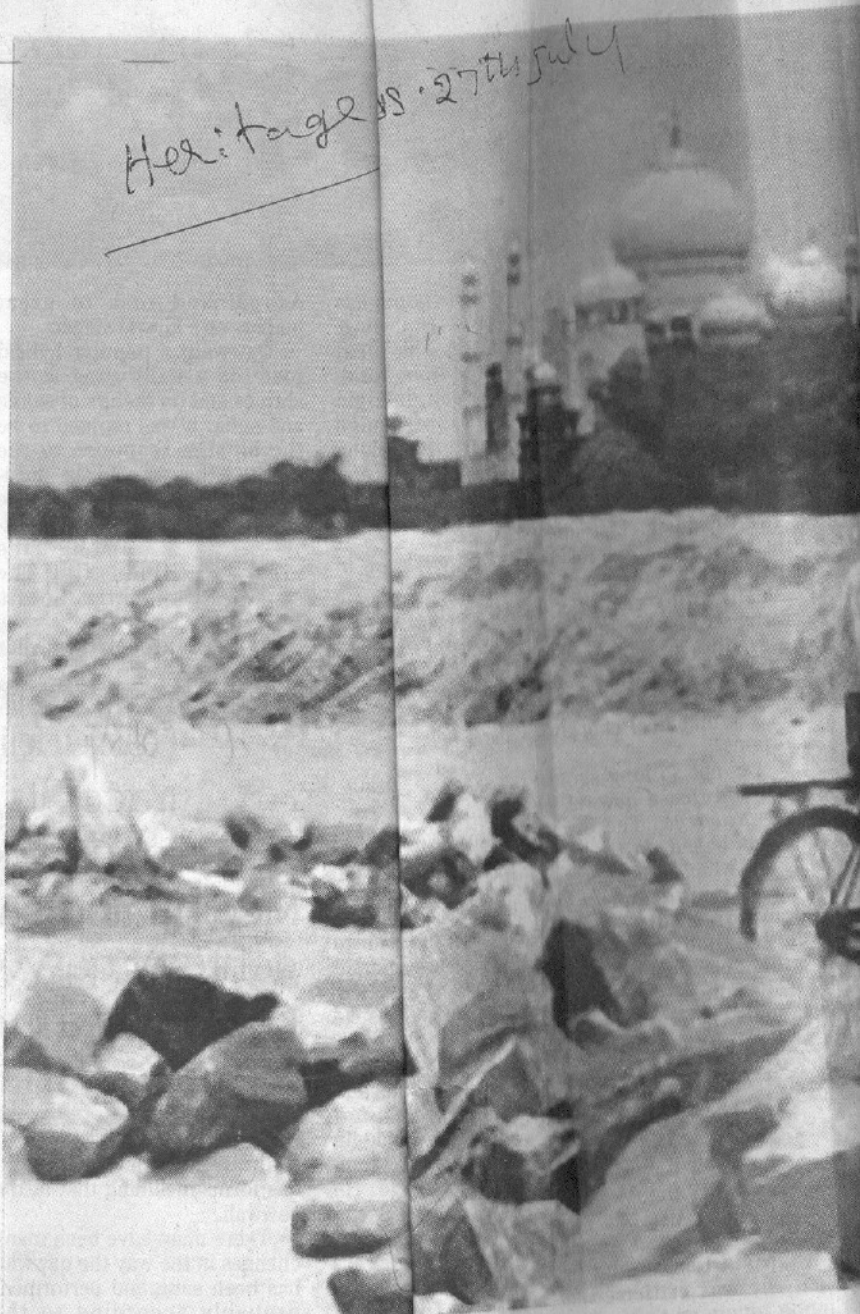
from thornment of India. How car project be cleared by the government without a signal from the central government agencies and ASI said.

After returning home from Europe, awati announced a one-manel under D.S. Bagga to conduct an inquiry into the ter. She pledged that the y will be punished for flout the Court orders. This furr entangled the issue as its only her government thad cleared the project.

To comicate the situation further, D. Bagga depoued Principle secretary Finance N.C. Bajpayee to conduct the probe. Ironically Bagga (who is being laced under the scanner here) is senior to Bajpayee by five years, and this is against the accepted norm as only a senior officer can investigate anything murky around a junior. It is also being considered as a

in the performance report 2002-03, presented by Environment Minister Nasimuddin Siddiqui during the budget session in August 2002 before the State Assembly. The project has proposed 120 crores rupees for the various projects around the Taj Trapezium. The department released 17 crores rupees to NPCC in November 2002 and assured 38 crores rupees by May 2003 as second instalment. Thus, "not only environment but also the finance department seem equally involved in this huge bungling," said a senior officer.

There is some foul play surely involved as crores rupees worth of contract removal of sand was given to the state government despite the fact that sand mining is source of revenue instead of expenditure. NPCC is claiming 10 crore rupees as 'penalty payment' from the government for it says it spent



ny tears more?

27th July

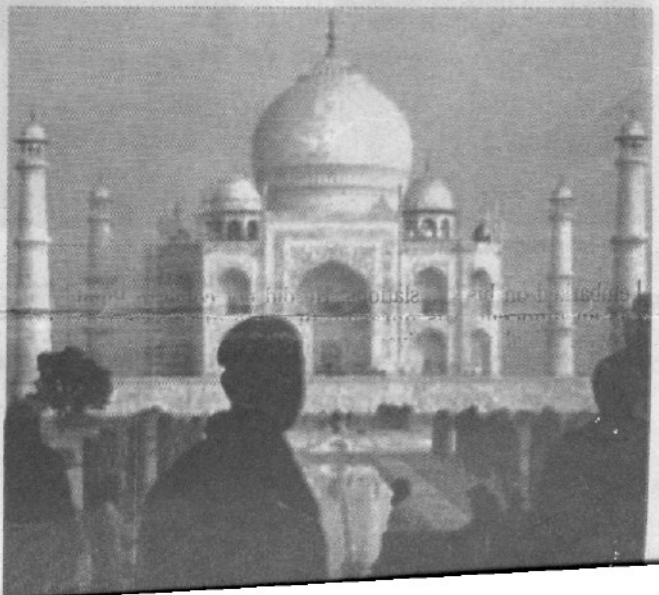


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irreparable loss has however
been made to the Taj, and the
original landscape of this
World Heritage monument has
been ruined forever. The
famed view of Taj Mahal from
Muthammam Burj (Jasmine
Tower) of Agra Fort that
Shahjahan enjoyed during his
imprisonment till his death is
there no more. Mehtab Bagh
across the Yamuna from where
Shahjahan saw the sun set is
there no more. "With the
change in Yamuna flow, the
beautiful gardens that were
excavated in 1994 are bound
to be submerged or irrepara-
bly eroded once the monsoon
sets in," said a senior ASI offi-
cial.


Taj Mahal was perceived as
a tear drop of a lover pre-
served in form of a marble
structure. Its constructed



10 crore rupees as 'pending payment' from the government for it says it spent 27 crore rupees to lift 21 million metric tons of sand and an equal quantity of yellow soil to dig a five feet pathway.

A probe is underway which if completed will find a place in a secretariat almirah. An

seems that some agents in the government want to rob the nation of its historical splendour — and leave behind a shopping mall, some restaurants, discos and cabarets. Perhaps, UNESCO should intervene to let this five-centuries-old monument of love exist, forever.



Work in progress: (main) The construction of a garish entertainment and shopping complex near the Taj Mahal; and (above) a view of the wonder in white.