

Kathputli Colony families who shifted happy with transit camp

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NEW DELHI: "I have never felt so good visiting Delhi before," said 60-year-old Janardan Bhorkhade as he sat comfortably on a bed inside a tiny room at the transit camp in Anand Parbat. The camp has been set up for slum-dwellers relocated from the nearby Kathputli Colony for a redevelopment project.

The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) is redeveloping the slum in-situ under a public-private-partnership with Raheja Developers. The colony residents will stay at the transit camp for nearly two years, while multi-storied apartments will be built for them at the slum.

Bhorkhade, a resident of Amravati, Maharashtra, married off his daughter to the son of Kathputli Colony resident Niranjan Labre (64) a few years ago. Bhorkhade, however, absolutely abhorred the idea of visiting his son-in-law.

"I find Kathputli Colony very filthy. Also, for morning ablutions, I would have to visit the nearby railway tracks," he said.

As soon as Labre and his family decided to move to the transit camp, his son invited his father-in-law. "This place is so clean and planned. It feels like heaven," Bhorkhade said.

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■ Those who shifted from Kathputli Colony to the transit camp have not stopped singing praises about their new home. VIRENDRA SINGH/HT

Anand Parbat transit camp, with its undulating but wide roads and small houses in neat rows, is slowly coming to life with more and more families from Kathputli Colony moving in. More than 40 families have shifted in the last few days.

While most residents are still opposing the redevelopment project, those who have shifted can't stop singing praises for their new abode.

"Even if the DDA doesn't give us the promised two-room flats, I will be more than happy living at the transit camp," said Ramdass Athawale, 48, another resident.

The camp has wide roads, clean toilets and bathrooms, an RO plant for potable water, a sewage treatment plant and round-the-clock security. The developer is providing free meals to the residents till they settle down in their new houses.

Almost all the families that have shifted are Marathi and from the colony's 'Marathi camp'. Kathputli Colony is unofficially divided into camps dominated by Rajasthanis such as bhats (puppeteers) and kalandars (magicians and animal trainers), Gujaratis, Andhraites etc.

"Marathis like me are mostly

employed as guards, peons, drivers etc. We have no problem in shifting base but Bhats with their huge puppets and other paraphernalia are finding it difficult to live in these small rooms," said Athawale.

Those who shifted also faced stiff resistance from those opposing the project. "We were verbally abused by our neighbours. It was only due to police protection that we could shift," said Raju Wankhede, 40, another resident. "It was, however, the best decision I could take to provide a better environment for my daughters to live in," he said.

STORY SO FAR...

- DDA announces Kathputli Colony in-situ redevelopment project in 2009
- Residents will be shifted to a transit camp in Anand Parbat for nearly two years, while 2,800 flats in multi-storey buildings are built for them in the colony
- The shifting process was to begin from February 24 but faced stiff resistance from the residents
- Families started shifting from March 1. More than 40 families have shifted to date.