



Growth Without Planning: lagging infrastructure expose the cracks in Punjab's real estate boom

Unplanned Colonies, Crumbling Infrastructure

Zirakpur, Kharar, New Chandigarh and adjoining areas struggle with inadequate roads, sewerage, parking and public amenities

Summer News, Chandigarh :

Zirakpur, Kharar, New Chandigarh and adjoining areas in Punjab's Mohali district have emerged as some of the fastest-growing real estate markets in the region over the past one-and-a-half decades. Their proximity to Chandigarh has attracted thousands of people who have purchased flats and plots in the hope of finding better housing and connectivity. A large number of private developers have also launched residential projects across these areas. However, the rapid pace of construction has not been matched by a corresponding expansion of urban planning and basic infrastructure. As a result, inadequate roads, sewerage, parking, drinking water, street lighting, drainage and public amenities have emerged as some of the biggest challenges facing these rapidly expanding urban centres. Several reports have also highlighted a growing gap between the delivery of housing projects and the development of surrounding infrastructure. In some projects, buyers received possession of their flats or plots, but basic facilities in and around the developments remained incomplete. In several locations, roads remained unfinished for years, while inadequate sewerage and stormwater drainage turned waterlogging into a recurring problem during the monsoon. Urban development experts believe that the growing demand for housing in the Chandigarh Tricity region led to rapid construction in Zirakpur and Kharar. Numerous private developers entered the market with new residential projects. However, urban planners and officials associated with municipal planning have repeatedly pointed out that infrastructure development has not kept pace with population growth. Existing road networks in several areas are now carrying traffic far beyond their original capacity. The expansion of schools, hospitals and commercial establishments has further aggravated congestion. The Patiala-Chandigarh road in Zirakpur, stretches connecting the Ambala-Chandigarh Highway and several major roads in Kharar have been experiencing sustained traffic pressure for years.

Monsoon exposes the gaps

Every monsoon, images of waterlogging from Zirakpur and surrounding areas once again bring the region's drainage problems into focus. Local residents and various resident welfare associations have for years complained that adequate stormwater drainage is not available in several areas. Questions have also been raised periodically over the cleaning of drains, expansion of drainage networks and the availability of pumping arrangements.

In many cases, even a short spell of rain is enough to inundate major roads, leaving commuters stuck in traffic for hours. Shopkeepers and local traders have also complained that waterlogging disrupts business and affects daily commercial activity.

Parking and public amenities under pressure...

The parking crisis has also intensified alongside the rapid construction of high-rise residential projects. Vehicles parked along roads outside several housing societies frequently obstruct traffic and reduce the effective width of already congested roads. Residents say that parks, community centres and public open spaces have also not been developed in proportion to the growing population in some areas. The issue has been raised repeatedly that while new colonies and housing projects continue to expand, adequate attention has not been paid to planning social and public infrastructure. Resident welfare associations in Zirakpur, Kharar and surrounding areas have raised their concerns through protests, memoranda and public hearings. Residents maintain that they purchased properties



with the expectation of receiving better civic amenities, but basic facilities remain incomplete at several locations. In some cases, residents have accused developers of failing to fulfil promises made at the time of sale.

Government and administration step up action

The Punjab government and the Greater Mohali Area Development Authority (GMADA) have, over the past few years, claimed to have taken action against unauthorised colonies and construction carried out in violation of rules. On several occasions, officials have stated that surveillance over unauthorised colonies and construction activities is being strengthened. Notices have been issued against illegal constructions at various locations, while action has also been taken against some projects. Authorities have repeatedly advised people to invest only in approved projects after verifying the necessary permissions and approvals. The administration has also stated from time to time that work related to road

widening, drainage improvement and traffic management is being undertaken in phases to strengthen the region's infrastructure.

Developers say projects comply with rules...

Real estate companies operating in Zirakpur, Kharar and the wider Tricity region have consistently maintained that their projects have been developed in accordance with approved plans and regulations issued by the government and the concerned development authorities. Developers argue that many of the problems are not within individual projects but relate to external infrastructure, which falls under the responsibility of the government and local authorities. Some developers have also pointed out that the population has grown much faster than anticipated over the past several years. Roads and sewer networks designed for a particular population are now facing several times the expected pressure.

GMADA and civic bodies take action...

GMADA, the Zirakpur Munic-

ipal Council and the Kharar Municipal Council have periodically taken action against unauthorised colonies and construction carried out in violation of regulations. Notices have been issued against colonies being developed without permission, while bulldozers have been used against illegal constructions in some cases. Authorities have also advised prospective buyers to verify all necessary approvals before investing in such projects. GMADA has publicly maintained that compliance with approved layout plans, road networks, sewerage systems and other stipulated conditions will be ensured. Meanwhile, municipal bodies have announced various projects aimed at improving drainage, repairing roads and strengthening street lighting in waterlogging-prone areas.

Traffic emerges as the biggest challenge...

Zirakpur and Kharar are no longer merely residential towns. Large shopping complexes, schools, hospitals and commercial establishments have expanded rapidly in

these areas, putting enormous pressure on the existing transport network. Long traffic jams have become a regular feature at Zirakpur Chowk, Patiala Road, the Ambala-Chandigarh Highway, PR-7 Airport Road and several major routes in Kharar. During peak hours, commuters often spend considerable time covering relatively short distances.

Rain adds to the concern...

Almost every monsoon, waterlogging in Zirakpur and neighbouring areas becomes a major issue. Residents say that rainwater remains stagnant for hours at several locations, affecting traffic and entering shops, houses and basement parking areas. The administration has repeatedly claimed that drains are being cleaned, pumping stations strengthened and drainage networks improved.

Political blame game intensifies...

Unplanned development in the Tricity region has also become a political issue. Opposition parties have repeatedly accused governments of approving new projects without ensuring adequate infrastructure to support the growing population. The ruling side, on the other hand, maintains that problems accumulated over several years are being addressed in a phased manner. Leaders associated with the Assembly and local bodies have also periodically demanded faster road widening, better sewerage systems, improved traffic management and stronger action against unauthorised colonies. Whether infrastructure development is keeping pace with the speed at which the region is being urbanised.

Cases in a Year: 85.4-Crore Suspicious Billing to 260-Crore Fake Invoices

Fake Billing: Business on Paper, Fraud in Reality

Summer news,

Chandigarh : The network of GST fake billing and fraudulent input tax credit (ITC) claims in Punjab continues to remain under the scrutiny of enforcement agencies. An examination of recent cases indicates that the racket is not limited to issuing fake invoices. It allegedly involves obtaining GST registrations in the names of non-existent companies, issuing invoices without any actual purchase or sale of goods, generating e-way bills, showing paper transactions through bank accounts, and then claiming or passing on ITC on the basis of such transactions. Actions taken by the tax department and Central GST authorities in cases linked to Ludhiana, Mandi Gobindgarh, Fatehgarh Sahib, Mohali and other industrial areas of the state have raised questions about the scale of this network.

One of the latest widely discussed cases is linked to Ludhiana-based API Plastic Recyclers Private Limited. According to Punjab Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema, the company's director and authorised signatory, Paramjit Singh, was arrested in connection with alleged fake transactions worth Rs 85.4 crore and wrongful availment of ITC amounting to Rs 15.56 crore. The investigation alleges that the company obtained invoices from firms located in several states that either later became inactive or were found not to have actually supplied the goods. According to the department, the registrations of some supplier firms had already been cancelled or suspended, while others were found not to be conducting genuine business. In such cases, fake in-



voices are primarily used to show purchases on paper. The purchasing firm then claims ITC on the basis of these purchases in its GST returns. If the supply has not actually taken place, the business should not be entitled to such tax credit. However, through fake documents and interconnected firms, an entire chain of paper transactions is allegedly created. The same credit can subsequently be passed on to other companies. This process not only causes potential loss to government revenue but also creates an uneven competitive environment for genuine businesses.

Several Major Networks Exposed Within a Year...

According to departmental data, the scope of action against tax evasion increased significantly in Punjab during the financial year 2025-26. Figures released by the Finance Minister indicate that the department identified 1,579 suspicious dealers during the year. Following verification, 922 entities were found to be non-existent and their registrations were cancelled. During the same period, several major networks involving fake billing and suspicious transactions were detected. These included alleged fake billing transactions worth around Rs 900 crore linked to the gold trade in Ludhiana, suspicious coal transac-



tions worth Rs 226 crore connected with Mohali, Kharar and Kotkapura, and an alleged fake billing network involving Rs 423 crore in Ludhiana and Mandi Gobindgarh. However, these figures should be viewed as the value of fake billing or suspicious transactions and should not be directly equated with the actual loss of government revenue.

A separate investigation in the Ludhiana division resulted in the registration of 12 FIRs and the recovery of more than Rs 20 crore. The department said that during data analysis, the purchases reported in GST returns were matched with e-way bill data. In several cases, purchases were claimed, but there was no reliable record of corresponding movement of goods.

Mandi Gobindgarh Emerges as a Major Investigation Zone...

Mandi Gobindgarh and Ludhiana, two important centres on Punjab's industrial map, have emerged as key areas of investigation in such cases. In July 2025, the Central GST Ludhiana Commissionerate detected an alleged network involving five firms. According to officials, fake invoices worth around Rs 260 crore were generated through these firms, with the initial estimated GST loss put at nearly Rs 47 crore. The investigation allegedly found that

debt-ridden rolling mills were being used for such activities. Two people were arrested in the case. In September 2025, another case involving a firm in Mandi Gobindgarh came to light, involving fake invoices worth Rs 29.43 crore and an estimated tax evasion of Rs 5.29 crore.

How the Entire Network Allegedly Operates...

Taken together, the cases investigated so far indicate that fake billing appears to operate through several stages. The first involves obtaining GST registration using fake or benami identities. The second stage is the creation of fake purchase and sale invoices in the names of these firms. In the third stage, e-way bills or other transport documents are prepared to create the appearance of movement of goods on paper. The next step involves claiming ITC on the basis of fake purchases and passing it on to other firms. In several cases, investigations also extend to companies that allegedly used such credit to reduce their tax liability or claim IGST refunds on exports. The challenge for authorities is that the entire chain can appear to be a legitimate business transaction on paper. The firm may have a GST number, bank account, invoices and e-way bills, but no actual supply of goods may have taken

place. Therefore, instead of relying solely on return scrutiny, departments are increasingly linking GST returns, e-way bills, banking transactions, registration documents and physical verification of business premises.

How Much Revenue Was Lost and How Much Was Recovered?...

The total value of fake invoices and the actual revenue loss to the government are two different figures. For example, in the case involving alleged fake transactions worth Rs 85.4 crore, the wrongful ITC availed was reported at Rs 15.56 crore. Similarly, in the case involving fake invoices worth Rs 260 crore, the initial estimated GST loss was put at Rs 47 crore. Therefore, it would not be correct to add the billing amounts in all cases and directly describe the total as government revenue loss. For the financial year 2025-26, the Punjab government has claimed that, as part of its broader tax enforcement drive, penalties amounting to Rs 1,383.11 crore were imposed and Rs 1,137.85 crore was recovered. The department also blocked suspicious ITC worth Rs 244.82 crore and reversed ITC amounting to Rs 206.64 crore. Taken together, these two categories represent Rs 451.46 crore in revenue that the department

claims to have protected. These figures, however, are not limited exclusively to fake billing cases and relate to broader tax evasion and enforcement actions.

New Strategy Tightens the Net...

The Punjab Tax Department is now placing greater emphasis on data analytics and intelligence-based investigations. Cases are being shortlisted on the basis of indicators such as suspicious GST registrations, unusual turnover, sudden increases in returns, discrepancies in e-way bills and differences between reported business activity and the actual operation of firms. During a special statewide drive in January 2026, 141 vehicles linked to the iron and steel trade were stopped in various areas. The department also focused on cases where goods were allegedly being transported without proper invoices or where suspicious e-way bills were suspected to have been used.

However, one section of the business community has also expressed concern that genuine traders should not face unnecessary notices or investigations during strict enforcement drives.

The Next Phase of Investigation...

The department's investigations in ongoing cases are no longer limited to firms that allegedly issued fake invoices. Authorities are now trying to determine who actually benefited from the fake ITC, through which bank accounts the money moved and which businesses knowingly or unknowingly used such credit. In the Ludhiana case involving Rs 85.4 crore in alleged fake transactions, the role of non-existent or inactive suppliers and

the identification of the actual beneficiaries are important parts of the investigation. Similarly, in July 2026, an alleged fake billing case involving a Jalandhar-based firm surfaced, involving fake invoices worth Rs 55.35 crore and alleged fraud relating to ITC of Rs 8.35 crore. The investigation is expected to focus on identifying the beneficiaries and tracing the flow of funds. In several cases, allegations involve fake registrations, paper transactions, e-way bills and multi-layered chains for passing on ITC. Government action and data-driven monitoring are helping uncover such networks, but the real challenge is to ensure that investigations do not stop at identifying fake firms. They must also reach the operators of the entire network, those who prepared the fraudulent documents, the ultimate beneficiaries of the ITC and the actual revenue loss caused to the government.

Finance Minister Cheema: Government Will Dismantle Such Networks...

Recently, Punjab Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema said that the state government was taking strict action against GST fake billing and fraudulent ITC. He said the State Tax Department had arrested the alleged key accused in a fake billing network involving invoices worth Rs 55 crore. The network allegedly involved claims of fraudulent input tax credit amounting to around Rs 8.35 crore. Cheema said the government was committed to dismantling such networks and protecting public revenue through data-driven monitoring and stringent enforcement action.

Five Golden Rules to Survive in Water

Water safety expert Saurav Arora explains how basic survival skills can save lives

Summr News

Ludhiana, Chandigarh:

As the monsoon sets in, incidents of drowning in rivers, canals and reservoirs tend to increase. Whether it is a recent boat accident in Jabalpur or the canal-related mishaps reported in Punjab every year, many deaths occur not simply because people cannot swim, but because they lack knowledge of basic water-survival techniques and do not know how to control panic during an emergency. To spread awareness about water safety, Samar News Director Payal Mahindra spoke exclusively with Indian swimming coach and water-safety expert Saurav Arora. For the past 15 years, Arora has been training children and adults in swimming and water survival. He explained the science behind staying safe in water in simple and practical terms.



1. Wearing a life jacket is not enough; body position can save your life...

Saurav Arora says that people are often given life jackets on flights or boats, but are rarely told how to position their bodies after entering the water. "People assume that once they put on a life jacket, they will automatically be safe. That is one of the biggest misconceptions," he says. According to Arora, even a person wearing a life jacket can get into serious trouble if they end up in an unsafe body position or place excessive weight on the jacket. He recommends the HELP position- Heat Escape Lessening Posture. In this position, the body should remain upright, with the legs slightly bent and drawn towards the chest. The arms should be folded close to the chest rather than being used

constantly to hold or adjust the life jacket. The aim is to reduce heat loss and keep the mouth above the water. The most important rule, he says, is to avoid panic. "When a person panics, breathing becomes rapid, more water may enter the mouth, and energy is lost much faster. Staying calm can significantly improve your chances of survival. A properly used life jacket can keep a person afloat for a long time," he explains.

2. How did the woman in the Jabalpur accident survive?...

Recalling the recent boat accident in Jabalpur, Arora referred to an interview with a woman survivor that had circulated widely on social media. According to her account, she had previously seen advice online that if someone begins to drown, they should try to keep their body straight, continue controlled move-

ment and regulate their breathing. She followed those instructions and survived. Arora said that, perhaps unknowingly, she had used elements of water treading and back-float techniques. "If you are exhausted and the shore is far away, do not waste all your energy trying to swim continuously. Instead, turn onto your back, keep your stomach and chest raised towards the surface, make gentle movements with your hands and control your breathing. This can help you stay afloat without exhausting yourself," he says. He cautions against frantic movements. "Thrashing your arms and legs rapidly can make you tired much faster. The first priority should always be to stay calm, control your breathing and conserve energy."

3. What should you do after rescuing a drowning person?...

According to Arora, the moments immediately after a drowning person is brought out of the water are critical, and this is where people often make mistakes. He advises people to seek emergency medical help immediately and keep the rescued person warm. He also stresses that untrained people should not attempt complicated medical procedures. If the person is unconscious and not breathing normally, CPR should be started by someone trained to perform it, while emergency medical services should be contacted without delay. The key message, he says, is simple: call for professional medical assistance as quickly as possible and follow basic first-aid procedures rather than relying on traditional or unverified methods.

4. Swimming is not just a sport; it can also support rehabilitation...

Arora says exercise in water has significant therapeutic benefits because water reduces the load placed on the body. "People with knee problems, those recovering from surgery and elderly individuals who may find walking difficult on land can often perform controlled exercises in water more comfortably," he says. Water provides natural resistance, allowing muscles to be strengthened while reducing the impact on joints. This is one reason aquatic exercise and water-based rehabilitation are often used as part of recovery programmes after certain injuries. However, Arora stresses that such exercises should be performed under proper supervision, particularly by people recovering from surgery or serious injuries.

5. Punjab has talent, but lacks swimming infrastructure...

Arora also raised concerns about swimming facilities in Punjab. According to him, the state has considerable talent but lacks adequate public infrastructure to nurture it. He said that outside Mohali, access to proper government swimming facilities remains limited. In a major city like Ludhiana, children with potential often have to depend on expensive private clubs for regular training. "For several months of the year, pools remain difficult to use because we do not have enough temperature-controlled, all-weather facilities. If Ludhiana gets a well-equipped government all-weather swimming pool, the city has the potential to produce swimmers capable of competing at national and international levels," he said. Arora believes that southern states such as Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu have made

greater progress in swimming partly because of better access to swimming infrastructure and greater emphasis on the sport at the grassroots level. **Swimming is a life saving skill...**

At the end of the conversation, Arora appealed to families to treat water safety as a basic life skill rather than merely a recreational activity. "Do not leave children unattended near floodwaters, rivers, canals or boats. Never enter the water under the influence of alcohol. Most importantly, parents should ensure that their children learn to swim and understand basic water safety," he said. His message is clear: swimming is not merely a hobby or a competitive sport. Knowing how to stay afloat, control breathing, conserve energy and respond calmly in an emergency can make the difference between life and death.

Punjab's 2027 Battle Lines Take Shape, New Political Equations Will Also Pose Challenges

2027: Four-Way Battle- AAP Defends, Congress Divided, BJP Expands, Akali Dal Rebuilds Base

Summer News, Chandigarh :

The Punjab Assembly elections are still about a year away, but the political groundwork for the 2027 contest has already begun in earnest. The ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), the main opposition Congress, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) have all started preparing for the electoral battle in their own ways. In the 117-member Assembly, AAP secured a sweeping majority with 92 seats in the 2022 elections. The Congress emerged as the principal opposition with 18 seats, while the SAD won three and the BJP two. The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and an independent candidate won one seat each. Subsequent by-elections and defections have altered the Assembly arithmetic, but the 2027 contest is currently shaping up largely around four major political camps. The political faction associated with Amritpal Singh and other smaller groups, however, could also influence the outcome in several constituencies. Recent political developments suggest that the 2027 election may not be as one-sided as the 2022 contest. The AAP government is seeking another mandate on the basis of its welfare schemes, administrative decisions and claims of governance achievements. The Congress, meanwhile, is trying to build an anti-incumbency narrative against the government. The BJP is expanding its organisation with a strategy to contest the Punjab Assembly elections independently for the first time, while the Akali Dal is working to rebuild its traditional Panthic and rural support base.

AAP Faces the Anti-Incumbency Test...

The biggest challenge before the Bhagwant Mann government is to convince voters to give it another term by turning its five-year record into a central electoral issue. The government is likely to highlight free electricity, free travel for women in state-run buses, healthcare, education, employment and its campaign against drugs. Welfare schemes providing financial assistance to women could also become an important part of AAP's election campaign. However, the government is expected to face opposition attacks over Punjab's financial condition, unemployment, the drug menace, law and order, allegations of corruption and farmers' concerns. Given the deep imprint of farmers' movements on Punjab's politics, no political party can afford to ignore issues linked to agriculture and the rural economy. Dissatisfaction among young people over government jobs and competitive examinations could also become a significant part of the electoral debate. AAP's victory in the Ludhiana West Assembly by-election in 2025 provided some relief to the government. However, treating by-election and local-body election results as a direct indicator of the 2027 Assembly mandate would be risky. Punjab's voters have often voted differently in Assembly, Lok Sabha and local elections.

Congress' Biggest Challenge: Keeping Its House in Order...

The Congress is seeking to emerge as the strongest alternative to AAP in 2027. The party has an established organisational network, a support base in



both rural and urban areas and several experienced leaders. Its performance in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections also strengthened its confidence that it can challenge AAP. Maintaining that momentum until the Assembly election, however, will not be easy. Political differences involving Punjab Congress president Amarinder Singh Raja Warring, former Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi, Partap Singh Bajwa and Sukhjinder Singh Randhawa have remained a subject of discussion within the party. Even after the Congress central leadership decided in July to retain Warring as state president and assign Channi the responsibility of the election campaign committee, internal dissatisfaction did not completely disappear. Some leaders associated with the Channi camp have demanded organisational changes. Punjab Congress in-charge Bhupesh Baghel has held discussions with party leaders in an attempt to bridge differences, but the leadership issue remains a challenge. Warring has publicly rejected speculation about factionalism and maintained that all leaders are united.

BJP Prepares for a Solo Contest...

For the BJP, the 2027 election is a major opportunity to establish an independent political identity in Punjab. The party remained in alliance with the Akali Dal for a long period, which meant its electoral influence was largely concentrated in urban and Hindu-majority constituencies. By contesting independently, the BJP now wants to expand its reach among rural and Sikh voters as well. The challenge, however, is significant. The party will have to overcome the hostile atmosphere that developed in rural Punjab during the farmers' movement and strengthen its limited organisational presence in many rural areas. The BJP leadership has been trying to increase dialogue with farmer organisations. In March, various farmer groups reportedly raised issues such as a legal guarantee for minimum support price, farm loan waivers, resolution of river-water disputes, fair crop prices and priority for Punjab's youth in employment before the party's state leadership. This indicates that the BJP will need to articulate a clearer position on farmers' concerns ahead of 2027.

Panthic politics is another challenge for the BJP.

The party is attempting to improve its acceptability among Sikh leaders and on religious issues, but its traditional support base in this space has remained limited.

Akali Dal Faces a Battle for Survival and Revival...

The Shiromani Akali Dal views 2027 as an opportunity for political revival. After its poor performance in 2022 and the political crisis that followed, the party's traditional support base weakened. Under party president Sukhbir Singh Badal, efforts are underway to reactivate the organisation. The party launched a public outreach programme featuring 40 rallies nearly a year before the election. The objective was to reconnect with rural Punjab and rebuild its traditional Panthic support base. The biggest challenge for the Akali Dal is that Panthic politics is no longer as united as it once was. Several factions are active both within and outside the party. Political groups associated with Amritpal Singh and other Panthic organisations are also trying to expand their influence among Sikh voters. The Akali Dal therefore

faces a dual challenge: rebuilding its old credibility while responding to questions about its leadership and political direction. Panthic issues are likely to remain important in the 2027 election, but their character could be different from the 2017 and earlier contests. Along with issues concerning religious sentiments, matters such as the release of imprisoned Sikh prisoners, justice in sacrilege cases, autonomy of Sikh institutions and Punjab's rights may remain part of the political discourse. The Akali Dal wants to re-establish its traditional claim over these issues, while other Panthic groups are challenging that position. If the Panthic vote is divided among several parties and candidates, AAP, Congress or the BJP could benefit in closely contested constituencies.

Farmers' Issues Could Again Become a Key Electoral Axis...

Farmers' concerns are likely to remain at the heart of Punjab's politics. A legal guarantee for minimum support price, crop diversification, farm debt, moving away from the paddy-wheat cycle, declining groundwater levels and the distribution of canal water

are among the issues that could influence rural voters. Farmer organisations are not aligned with any single political party, which is why all major parties are seeking greater dialogue with them. Political differences over Punjab's river-water disputes could also remain a major issue. As a result, farmers' voting behaviour in 2027 may depend not only on party affiliation but also on local candidates and specific issues.

How Much Impact Will the Gen-Z Movement Have?...

The Gen-Z movement that has emerged around education, alleged irregularities in competitive examinations, employment and government accountability has presented a new challenge to political parties. Young people active on social media are increasingly questioning issues such as employment, transparency in examination systems and equal opportunities rather than responding only to traditional political slogans. Recent youth movements have demonstrated how social media can generate political pressure on a large scale within a short period. It is too early to say whether this trend will directly benefit any particular party in Punjab. However, among voters aged 18 to 30, unemployment, fairness in competitive examinations, the pressure to migrate abroad and the drug problem are likely to remain important concerns. A party that presents credible solutions on these issues could gain an advantage among young voters. An important feature of Gen-Z politics is that young voters actively scrutinise political statements and promises on social media.

IGMC: Himachal's Strongest Healthcare Pillar

Dr. Rahul Rao on why patients trust the institution, its modern facilities, doctors' workload, Chamiyana Hospital and the growing mental health crisis

Summer News,

Shimla : Indira Gandhi Medical College (IGMC), Shimla, is widely regarded as Himachal Pradesh's largest and most prestigious healthcare institution. For many people, it is not merely a hospital but a place of hope they turn to during the most difficult moments of their lives. Patients from across the state come here expecting access to advanced treatment and specialised medical care. In an exclusive conversation with The Summer News Senior Editor Mohit Prem Sharma, IGMC Medical Superintendent Dr Rahul Rao spoke at length about the institution's journey, modern healthcare facilities, challenges faced by doctors and staff, patients' expectations, the role of Chamiyana Hospital and the growing mental health challenges in society. Here are the key excerpts:

Q: IGMC is considered the largest and most prestigious hospital in Himachal Pradesh. What has your journey to this institution been like?...

Dr Rahul Rao: IGMC is not only a prestigious institution in Himachal Pradesh but also one of the well-known medical institutions in North India. It is nearly 70 years old and is considered the foundation of modern healthcare services in Himachal Pradesh. I completed my MBBS in 1994 and joined government service in 2001. I subsequently served in different parts of the state, including Sirmour, Mandi and Shimla. Later, I specialised in hospital administration and got the opportunity to serve at IGMC as Deputy Medical Superintendent. I worked in that position for nearly 10 years and have been serving as Medical Superintendent for around the last four years.



Q: What inspired you to work for patients and serve society?...

Dr Rahul Rao: I have an emotional connection with IGMC because I was also born at KNH, which is associated with this institution. Very few people get the opportunity to serve at the same institution where they were born. Every person who comes to a hospital does so because of a compulsion or a difficult situation. The distinction between the rich and the poor disappears at the hospital door. Every patient arrives with hope. When we are able to help someone, it gives doctors and the administrative team a sense of satisfaction that they are giving something back to society.

Q: Is the spirit of public service also rooted in your family?...

Dr Rahul Rao: My family has had a strong tradition of both public service and administration. My grandfather, Raja Ram Rao, was actively involved in social service. He helped families in need and supported the education and marriages of girls. My father, Dr NC Rao, also contributed to the field of medical education and played an important role in the vision behind the

establishment of a dental college. My mother, Dr Anita Rao, served as the Director of Education in Himachal Pradesh. My uncle, Rangila Ram Rao, was also associated with politics and public service for a long time. The values I inherited from my family inspired me to serve society through hospital administration.

Q: Patients sometimes complain that doctors do not always behave appropriately. How do you view this concern?...

Dr Rahul Rao: Doctors are also part of society. They are not gods; they are human beings. Doctors try to perform their responsibilities around the clock and throughout the week. At a large institution like IGMC, doctors work under tremendous pressure. The hospital is not only responsible for treating patients but also for training medical students and paramedical staff. Long working hours, a large number of patients and serious medical cases can sometimes increase stress. However, the direction given by Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu to ensure that doctors do not have to work beyond eight hours is a positive step.

Q: What modern facilities are currently available at IGMC?...

Dr Rahul Rao: IGMC began with around 300 beds, whereas today it is a major hospital with approximately 1,100 beds. Several super-speciality services have been added over the years. These include cardiology, cardiothoracic surgery, cancer treatment, urology, gastroenterology, medicine, surgery and trauma care. IGMC also has a Level I Trauma Centre, which is an extremely important facility for the entire state. Earlier, patients often had to travel to institutions such as PGI, AIIMS or private hospitals for several specialised investigations and treatments. Today, many advanced medical facilities are available within Himachal Pradesh itself.

Q: How are patients benefiting from new machines and technology?...

Dr Rahul Rao: Earlier, IGMC had limited MRI, CT scan and ultrasound facilities, which meant that patients often had to wait for long periods. The institution now has advanced equipment, including a 3-Tesla MRI machine. CT scan facilities have also been expanded. The

introduction of PET scan services has provided major relief to cancer patients. In the private sector, a PET scan could cost between Rs 20,000 and Rs 25,000, whereas IGMC is providing the facility at much lower rates. Hundreds of patients have already benefited from the service within just a few months.

Similarly, robotic surgery is now becoming available in the government healthcare sector. Until recently, such technology often seemed like something accessible only in major private hospitals. Its availability in the public sector is an important step forward.

Q: There is often confusion among people regarding Chamiyana Hospital. Where should patients go in case of a heart or other emergency?

Dr Rahul Rao: There is no need for people to be confused. Chamiyana Hospital is part of IGMC itself. Several super-speciality outpatient department services are being operated there, while inter-departmental services continue to be available at the main IGMC campus as well. If a patient comes to the main IGMC hospital, he or she will not be turned away. If necessary, doctors from the relevant department examine the patient and, depending on the requirement, refer the patient to Chamiyana. Chamiyana is a new facility and its services are being expanded gradually. Emergency services have also been started. Patients should not worry that they will be denied treatment simply because they have reached the wrong location.

Q: Is IGMC facing a shortage of doctors and staff?...

Dr Rahul Rao: In terms of doctors, most of the sanctioned posts at IGMC are filled. The number of

faculty members is also adequate. However, there is some shortage of nursing and paramedical staff. Around 150 to 200 nursing posts are vacant, but the government has assured that these positions will be filled through the recruitment process. Earlier, the hospital was functioning with only around 40 per cent of its manpower capacity. That has now improved to approximately 75 per cent. There are still some gaps, but the situation is much better than before.

Q: How do you assess Himachal Pradesh's overall healthcare system?...

Dr Rahul Rao: Himachal Pradesh has a strong government healthcare infrastructure. Compared with many other states, people in Himachal have considerable faith in government healthcare services. The state has a network of medical colleges, civil hospitals, primary health centres and sub-centres. Considering its population, the availability of healthcare institutions in Himachal is significant. There are certainly challenges, but the state's public healthcare system is in a relatively strong position.

Q: Many senior politicians and officials often travel outside the state for treatment. Does that mean they do not have confidence in IGMC?...

Dr Rahul Rao: When former Chief Minister Virbhada Singh was undergoing treatment during his final days, there was also discussion about shifting him outside the state. However, he expressed his faith in IGMC and said that this was an institution he had helped build and that he had complete confidence in it. That itself is a significant reflection of the trust and credibility IGMC enjoys.

Q: Cases of suicide and drug abuse appear to be increasing in society. How do you view this growing problem?...

Dr Rahul Rao: In the past, joint families provided a strong support system. People talked to one another, family members spent time together and children received collective attention. Today, mobile phones, busy lifestyles and a decline in communication within families have created a sense of emptiness. Children and parents are often occupied with their own mobile phones. The same is true in cases involving drug abuse. Families sometimes refuse to acknowledge the early warning signs. When doctors tell parents that their child may be showing signs of addiction, some families are unwilling to accept it.

This problem cannot be solved by the government or hospitals alone. It is a collective responsibility of society. Families, educational institutions, healthcare professionals and the wider community must work together to identify problems early and provide support before the situation becomes serious.

Q: Do you have any plans to enter politics?...

Dr Rahul Rao: I am happy with my present responsibility. My priority is to run the hospital efficiently and strengthen cleanliness, nursing care, patient facilities and administrative systems. My education and experience in hospital administration are being put to use here. Every day, people come to me who either cannot afford treatment or need help navigating the healthcare process. Being able to provide relief to such people gives me the greatest satisfaction. For me, that is the most meaningful form of service.

Bittu's Exit: A New BJP Game Plan for Punjab?

Resignation from Union Council of Ministers after Rajya Sabha term ends sparks speculation over BJP's Mission 2027 strategy; Bittu says top leadership has asked him to focus on strengthening the party in Punjab

Mission 2027: Bittu to Focus on Strengthening the Party in Punjab

Summer News, CHANDIGARH :

The resignation of Ravneet Singh Bittu, Minister of State for Railways and Food Processing, from the Union Council of Ministers has triggered fresh political discussions in Punjab. President Droupadi Murmu, on the advice of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, accepted Bittu's resignation with immediate effect. His term as a Rajya Sabha member had ended on June 21. Although he continued as a minister for some time after his parliamentary term expired, his resignation has now fuelled speculation that the BJP has drawn up a new political role for him in Punjab.

After resigning, Bittu said he had stepped down on the instructions of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. According to him, the top party leadership, particularly Prime Minister Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, wants him to focus fully on strengthening the BJP in Punjab. Bittu said he had met the Prime Minister and discussed the political situation in Punjab and the party's strategy for the state. He said that instead of continuing as a minister without being a member of either House of Parliament, he wanted to devote his time to the responsibility assigned to him by the party. Bittu's resignation cannot be viewed merely as a technical or constitutional development. After the completion of his Rajya Sabha term, the constitutional provision allowing a non-member to continue as a minister was available only for a limited period. The clearest political message from his resignation, therefore, is that the BJP may now want him to play a more active role in Punjab.

Bittu's resignation does not directly alter the balance of power in Punjab. The state continues to be governed by the Aam Aadmi Party, while the Congress, BJP and Shiromani Akali Dal are working separately to strengthen their political positions. However, the move could have an impact on the BJP's electoral strategy.

The BJP had failed to achieve the expected results in the previous Assembly election. Its biggest challenge is to strengthen its organisation at the grassroots level and reach voters who have traditionally supported the Congress, Akali Dal and, more recently, the Aam Aadmi Party. Giving Bittu a more active role could help the BJP signal that it wants greater direct participation in Punjab's politics and a stronger focus on local issues. At the same time, Bittu's individual political acceptability remains an important question. He contested the 2024 Lok Sabha election from Ludhiana on a BJP ticket but lost to Congress leader Amarinder Singh Raja Warring.

BJP Sees Opportunity, Congress Calls Him Opportunistic...

Within the BJP, Bittu's resignation is being viewed as an opportunity to assign him a larger role in the party's Punjab strategy. BJP leaders believe that he will now have more time to strengthen the organisation in the state. His supporters see the move as an indication of the party's growing political



activity in Punjab.

The opposition, however, has interpreted the development differently. Congress leaders argue that Bittu had to leave the Union ministry because his Rajya Sabha term had ended and the BJP did not choose to send him back to the Upper House. Some Congress leaders have also accused him of political opportunism. They point out that Bittu was elected to the Lok Sabha three times on a Congress ticket before joining the BJP and is now campaigning against the party that helped establish his political identity. Congress MLA Pargat Singh had earlier supported Rahul Gandhi's description of Bittu as a "traitor". Punjab Congress leaders have also accused Bittu of launching sharp attacks against his former party and its leadership after joining the BJP. The BJP, on the other hand, defended Bittu over Rahul Gandhi's remarks and linked the controversy to the alleged insult of the Sikh community. A public confrontation between Bittu and Rahul Gandhi on the premises of Parliament became one

of the most visible signs of the growing political divide between the two leaders. Rahul Gandhi called Bittu a "traitor", while Bittu responded with sharp criticism of the Congress leader.

Three-Time MP with a Strong Political Legacy...

Ravneet Singh Bittu is the grandson of former Punjab Chief Minister Beant Singh, who was assassinated in a suicide bombing in Chandigarh in 1995. His political and family background played an important role in giving him an early identity in Punjab politics. Bittu entered Parliament after winning the Lok Sabha elections in 2009, 2014 and 2019 on Congress tickets. He contested the 2017 Assembly election from the Lambi constituency but lost to Shiromani Akali Dal leader Sukhbir Singh Badal and finished third. Ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha election, Bittu left the Congress and joined the BJP. The party fielded him from Ludhiana, but he lost the election. He was subsequently brought into Parliament through the Rajya Sabha and was inducted into the third Narendra Modi government as Minister

of State for Railways and Food Processing.

Bittu has traditionally followed an aggressive political style. His remarks during the farmers' agitation also generated controversy, with critics accusing him of using strong language against farmer organisations. After joining the BJP, he repeatedly targeted the Congress leadership, Rahul Gandhi and the Punjab Congress.

Could Become a Key BJP Face in Punjab...

The biggest question following Bittu's resignation is what role he will now play. Political circles are speculating that the BJP could assign him a major organisational responsibility in Punjab and make him one of the prominent faces of its campaign for the upcoming Assembly election.

There is also speculation that the party could consider projecting him as a possible chief ministerial face. However, there has been no official indication from the BJP in this regard so far. Another important question is whether the BJP can use Bittu's political background to make inroads into the traditional vote bases of the Congress and other parties. His



long association with the Congress and the legacy of the Beant Singh family give him a distinct political identity. However, his defeat in the 2024 Lok Sabha election from Ludhiana also demonstrated that political legacy alone does not guarantee electoral success.

The coming period will therefore be challenging for Bittu. Along with strengthening the BJP's organisation in Punjab, he will have to establish his own political credibility within the party. The allegations of opportunism following his shift from the Congress to the BJP will have to be answered through organisational work and electoral performance. The BJP, meanwhile, will have to decide how much responsibility to give him and how to maintain a balance between Bittu and other senior leaders already active in the state.

A Test for the BJP...

Bittu's resignation is not, by itself, a major change in Punjab's political power structure. However, it could be viewed as an important indication of a possible shift in the BJP's strategy for the 2027 Assembly election. If the party

gives Bittu a significant responsibility, his biggest test will be to expand the BJP's organisational reach in areas where its influence remains limited. He will also have to effectively communicate the party's position on issues concerning farmers, rural voters, the business community and the youth.

Challenges Ahead for Bittu...

Bittu's future role will also be closely watched within the BJP. Coordination with existing party leaders, outreach to Sikh voters, an effective strategy against the Congress and Aam Aadmi Party, and the possibility of a multi-cornered contest in the absence of an alliance with the Akali Dal will all be crucial factors.

Therefore, Bittu's resignation appears less like an immediate change in Punjab's political power equation and more like an important signal about the BJP's preparations for 2027. The real impact will become clear only after the party announces his new role and he begins active work on the ground to strengthen the organisation and shape the BJP's electoral strategy in Punjab.

Rain Exposes Punjab's Urban Drainage Crisis

A widening gap between drainage claims and ground reality, with waterlogged roads, overflowing sewers

Summer News, Mohali

The monsoon season is once again putting the urban infrastructure of Mohali, Zirakpur, Kharar and Dera Bassi to the test. In several areas, even a brief spell of rain is enough to leave roads waterlogged, while low-lying neighbourhoods, markets and residential colonies face prolonged water accumulation. In Mohali, rainfall in the first week of July led

to reports of waterlogging in several areas, including Phases 2 to 7, Industrial Area Phase 8 and Airport Road. In Zirakpur, water accumulation on the Chandigarh-Ambala highway and adjoining roads disrupted traffic during rainfall. Similar complaints of waterlogging and sewer overflow were reported from parts of the Mohali-Kharar belt. The problem is not limited

to a single day of rain or the functioning of one municipal body. Rapid urbanisation, increasing pressure on natural drainage channels, incomplete road and sewerage projects, drains blocked by garbage, ageing drainage infrastructure and a lack of coordination between multiple agencies have turned waterlogging into an almost annual monsoon problem across these key

urban centres of the Mohali district. Local authorities maintain that measures such as cleaning drains, removing silt and arranging pumps are undertaken before the monsoon. However, the situation witnessed after rainfall continues to raise questions about the effectiveness of these preparations. Mohali was developed as a planned city, but the challenge of managing rainwater

has grown with its rapid expansion. After rainfall in early July, waterlogging was reported in Phases 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7, as well as Industrial Area Phase 8. Traffic on Airport Road was also affected by accumulated water. The municipal corporation had earlier reviewed monsoon preparations and issued directions to clear blocked drains. However, the rainfall exposed gaps in

the existing arrangements. One of the reasons for the problem is that road construction, sewerage and stormwater drainage work are being carried out simultaneously in several parts of the city. In some locations, roads have been dug up; in others, sewer lines remain incomplete, while road restoration has not been completed after construction work. As a result, rainwater

carries soil, silt and construction material into the drainage system, reducing its capacity. Recent reports have also highlighted waterlogging on several roads following light rain. The main road connecting Chandigarh to Mohali Phase 9 and the stretch between Fortis Hospital and Kumbhra Light Point were among the areas where commuters faced difficulties after rainfall.

Questions Mount Over Drain Cleaning Work Amid Rising Waterlogging Complaints

Natural streams and stormwater channels play an important role in draining rainwater from Mohali.

Concerns have repeatedly been raised over the accumulation of silt, garbage and encroachments along natural drainage routes such as the Patiala Ki Rao and N-Choe.

Plans to clean and streamline the Patiala Ki Rao have also been discussed at the municipal level. Officials have pointed out that years of accumulated silt and waste have reduced its drainage capacity. During heavy rainfall, this can contribute to waterlogging in surrounding areas. N-Choe has also been suggested for inclusion in cleaning and improvement plans. This is where a gap appears between public experience and official claims. Residents often say that drains are cleaned before the monsoon, but the removed silt and garbage are sometimes left along roadsides. When it rains, the same material can be washed back into the drains.

Recent complaints from several parts of Mohali indicate that even short spells of rain can lead to waterlogging, raising questions about whether pre-monsoon cleaning is sufficient without proper disposal of the waste and silt removed from drains.

Zirakpur: Rapid Growth, Weak Drainage...

Zirakpur faces a somewhat different set of challenges. Over the past few years, residential colonies, commercial complexes and traffic have expanded rapidly across the city and surrounding areas. The population and built-up area have increased, but the stormwater drainage system has not developed at the same pace. During rainfall, water accumulation has repeatedly been reported from low-lying areas, internal roads and stretches connected to the national highway. Heavy rain in July once again brought attention to waterlogging and traffic disruptions around the Chandigarh-Ambala highway.

Another major concern in Zirakpur is incomplete civic infrastructure. Recent reports have highlighted broken manhole covers, pothole-ridden roads, dug-up sewer lines and unfinished works. During the monsoon, open or damaged manholes combined with waterlogging increase the risk of accidents. The issue is therefore not merely about stagnant water. Zirakpur is a crucial link between Chandigarh, Panchkula, Mohali and Ambala. Any major disruption or slowdown on an important road can affect

traffic movement across the wider region. The city's drainage system, therefore, cannot be treated as an isolated local issue.

Garbage and Poor Roads Add to Kharar's Problems...

In Kharar, solid waste management is another important factor behind monsoon-related waterlogging. Recent reports have raised concerns about garbage piles in different parts of the town and the resulting risks of waterlogging and disease during the rainy season. When garbage is not collected on time and accumulates near drains or natural water channels, it can be washed away by rainwater and block drainage points. Plastic and other solid waste can further obstruct the flow of stormwater. The Kharar-Landran road has also remained a subject of concern over civic amenities and road conditions. The district administration has previously directed authorities to improve the condition of the road and ensure scientific drainage of rainwater. Work is also underway to strengthen the sewerage infrastructure in the area, including the development of a sewage treatment plant. However, such projects will deliver meaningful results only when road construction, sewerage and stormwater

drainage are planned as an integrated system. Separate projects implemented without coordination are unlikely to provide a permanent solution.

Low-Lying Areas at Greater Risk in Dera Bassi...

Dera Bassi and adjoining areas also face recurring concerns over waterlogging during the monsoon. Rapid urban and industrial expansion, combined with increasing pressure on natural drainage channels, has created additional challenges. Mohali, Zirakpur and Dera Bassi need to be viewed not merely as separate administrative units but as parts of a connected urban region. Rainwater does not respect administrative boundaries. Water flowing out of one area eventually enters another. Therefore, even if a drain is cleaned in one location, the entire system can fail if the downstream drainage route is blocked. This is why experts have long stressed the need for a comprehensive stormwater management plan. Such a plan should go beyond routine drain cleaning. It should include the protection of natural waterways, rainwater harvesting, construction of larger stormwater channels and a properly designed drainage network extending all the way to the final discharge points.



Rs 7-Crore Project Raises Hope, but Timely Execution Matters...

Considering the long-standing waterlogging problem in areas such as Sector 70, Sector 71, Matour, Phase 7 and Phase 3B2 of Mohali, a stormwater drainage project costing around Rs 7 crore was reportedly approved. The plan includes laying large-diameter underground pipelines from Matour Chowk to N-Chowk to improve the drainage of rainwater and tubewell discharge. Such projects indicate that the administration recognises

the seriousness of the problem. However, the real challenge lies in completing them on time and ensuring that their design is not limited to a single road or colony. If water is simply diverted from one location to another low-lying area, the problem may only shift rather than disappear.

Stop Turning an Annual Crisis into a Permanent Problem...

The waterlogging problem in Mohali, Zirakpur, Kharar and Dera Bassi is the result of several factors working together. These include rapid or unplanned

urban expansion, growing pressure on ageing stormwater infrastructure, silt and garbage in natural drains, incomplete road and sewerage works, damaged manholes and poor coordination among different departments. The responsibility of local bodies cannot end with cleaning drains before the monsoon. They must also ensure that removed silt is properly disposed of, garbage is collected regularly and the capacity of the entire stormwater drainage network is assessed.

Applications Open Until September 30; Registration, Bank Loans and Basic Utilities Likely to Become Easier

5,000 Illegal Colonies Set for Legal Recognition

Summer News, Chandigarh : The Punjab government has taken a significant step towards providing relief to millions of people living in nearly 5,000 illegal colonies across the state. The Cabinet has amended the Punjab Apartment and Property Regulation (PAPRA) Rules, making the regularisation process simpler than before. Under the new system, promoters of eligible colonies or Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) will be able to apply for regularisation until September 30. Once applications are approved, plot owners in these colonies will have an easier path towards property registration, bank loans, building approvals, and access to electricity, water and other basic services.

The government says a large number of families living in colonies developed years ago without the required approvals invested their lifetime savings in purchasing plots. However, due to legal complications, they have been unable to fully benefit from their properties. The objective of the new policy is to provide relief to such genuine buyers, while the existing provisions for legal action against those who developed illegal colonies will remain in place. Under the amended rules, illegal colonies where at least 25 per cent of the plots have been developed will also become eligible for regularisation. Applications can be submitted either by the colony promoter or by the RWA.



GMADA Regional Planning Areas Excluded...

The new system will also apply to certain eligible areas falling within local planning areas and areas identified as agricultural land under master plans. However, areas covered by the regional plan of the Greater Mohali Area Development Authority (GMADA) have been excluded. The government claims that the move will help resolve a large number of pending

cases. According to the government, the target is to issue a provisional regularisation certificate within 30 days of receiving a complete application. The competent authority will have to take a final decision on the application within six months. After depositing the regularisation fee, individual plot owners will be able to obtain regularisation certificates for their respective plots and become eligible to

get property registration and building approvals in accordance with the rules.

Easier Access to Property Loans...

Officials of the Department of Housing and Urban Development believe that regularisation will also make it easier for banks to provide loans against such properties. At present, a large number of people are unable to obtain bank loans simply because their properties are not consid-

ered legally regularised. The policy could also facilitate the expansion of electricity, water, sewerage and other urban services in these colonies. However, urban planning experts argue that along with regularisation, strict action against the development of illegal colonies in the future is equally important. Their argument is that if relief schemes are introduced periodically, some developers may view them as an incentive to violate regulations in the expectation that their projects will eventually be regularised.

Opposition Questions Timing Ahead of Election Year...

Opposition parties have welcomed the government's decision but have questioned its timing. They argue that the issue

of illegal colonies has remained unresolved for several years and that announcing relief ahead of the Assembly elections also carries a political message. The opposition says the government should not limit its efforts to regularisation alone. It should also present a clear financial roadmap for providing roads, sewerage, drinking water and other basic facilities in these colonies. The government, on the other hand, maintains that the decision is not part of an election strategy but a practical solution to a long-pending problem. Its argument is that thousands of families have been caught in legal complications through no fault of their own, and providing them relief is an administrative responsibility.

One Plot, Three Uses: Home, Shop and Office Allowed

-Building Plans to Be Approved Within Seven Days; Self-Certification to Reduce Bureaucracy

Summer News, Chandigarh : The Punjab government has taken another major step towards simplifying urban development and the building approval process by allowing residential, commercial and professional activities on the same plot in eligible areas. Under the amended building rules, homeowners will now be able to operate a shop, office or other permitted commercial activity alongside their residence on the same plot, subject to applicable conditions. The government has also decided to introduce a system under which building plans will be approved within seven working days and self-certification will be permitted for specified categories.

The government says make repeated visits to government offices while also encouraging investment and employment. The objective of the new system is to simplify building regulations in line with rapidly changing urban requirements. The government argues that in most cities across Punjab, a large number of people already operate shops, clinics, offices and other small businesses from their homes. However, under the older rules, they often faced several administrative hurdles. The amended rules are intended to bring such activities within a regulated framework and provide people with greater legal convenience. According to the government, residential and commercial use will now be permitted within the same building, provided prescribed standards and

land-use conditions are followed. Doctors, lawyers, chartered accountants, architects, consultants, small business owners and self-employed professionals are expected to benefit significantly from the move. They may no longer need to rent or purchase separate commercial premises, potentially reducing their operating costs. Another important part of the policy is the fixed timeline for building approvals. The department claims that once all required documents have been submitted, building plans will be approved within seven working days. If an application has any deficiency, the concerned official will have to clearly inform the applicant within the same period. The move is expected to reduce the problem of files remaining pending for months.

Reduced Dependence on Government Officials...



The government has also decided to introduce a self-certification system for certain categories of buildings. Under this system, authorised architects or licensed professionals will certify that the building plan and construction comply with the prescribed rules. The government says this will reduce dependence on officials for minor approvals and make the process more transparent and time-bound.

However, it has clarified that self-certification does not mean exemption from building regulations. If any violation is detected during a subsequent inspection, action can be taken under the rules against both the building owner and the professional who provided the certification.

-Business and Real Estate Sectors Welcome Move...

Urban development experts believe that the con-

cept of mixed land use has been successful in several cities around the world. It allows people to access employment and services closer to their homes and can reduce unnecessary travel. However, experts stress that strict compliance with parking, traffic, fire safety, sewerage and environmental standards will remain equally important. If monitoring is weak, traffic pressure and unplanned construction

could increase in several areas. Business organisations and representatives of the real estate sector have welcomed the government's decision. They say simpler regulations could increase investment in the construction sector, provide relief to small entrepreneurs and enable more productive economic use of properties. A fixed timeline for building plan approvals could also reduce delays in projects. Opposition Seeks Details of Monitoring System... Opposition parties have given a mixed response to the decision. They say simplifying the building approval process is a welcome step, but if monitoring by local bodies is not effective, unplanned commercial activities could increase in several areas.