

Notices sent to hundreds of property owners by MCD even while the strike continued



Delhi is still reeling under the affect of strike that ended recently

The strike called by MCD employees has ended following assurance by the Government to release their salaries till January 2016. The striking employees, whose dereliction of duty had resulted in loads of garbage piled up on roads and in colonies, have returned to work. But what has not been highlighted enough is that even during the strike period, MCD employees tried to generate revenue for their salaries, at least part of it, from the public by making surprise raids in various colonies and even sending notices to the property owners. During many such raids, MCD employees tried to keep a high moral ground by saying they are doing it to generate their salaries. With the strike ending and the salaries being paid, the property owners whose self-assessment has been found to be different from the assessment done by MCD employees are apprehensive whether they will get the respite from the penalties and huge interests glaring at them as per the notifications sent to them.

Property owners whom RNI talked to are of view that it is the public which is the ultimate sufferer and the same has

happened in this case as well. While strike continued and the striking unions were not even allowing lifting of garbage at many places, certain MCD employees continued to work, penalizing the public with a view to collect enough money to meet some of their salaries. RNI has sufficient evidences to show the teams of Assessor and Collector Department of MCD were moving in various colonies during strike period, inspecting the houses and shops and even delivering the notices to public under section 123D of the DMC Act, 2003 which threaten to assess or re-open assessment of the properties. As per information available, hundreds of notices have already been served and more are being served every day.

Penalizing the defaulters and collecting tax is something that the Employees of Assessor and Collector Department are supposed to do, but it was the timing that led to raised eyebrows as never before was an exercise of such a magnitude carried by the Municipal Corporation employees to inspect properties and raise money. Property owners to whom notices have been served too are blaming the political game which resulted in the wrath falling on the common man (aam aadmi).

Common man it is who is at the receiving end of most cases of State Government and Central Government spat! Agreed SK Bhati, Assessor and Collector in Shahdara (South) Zone of EDMC, who himself spearheaded visit to various colonies and sent notices to various property owners in East Delhi. He said that the Governments would continue to fight but the money they would collect from the public will at least help the MCD employees get salaries for a couple of month. The idea it seemed was to pinch where it hurts the most. Unless the public suffered and spoke out, the Governments would not pay heed to the problems of the MCD staff. Not removing the garbage or even spilling it on main roads too appeared to be done with the same purpose. SK Bhati was critical of both the Governments (at the Centre and in the Capital) but blamed Arvind Kejriwal more for failing to deliver on promises.

Employees of Municipal Corporation were indeed suffering because of non-payment of salaries but it was also the common public that was suffering because of the consequent strike, both because of hazards to health that the garbage and emanating stench could bring but also because they got at the receiving end of the wrath of MCD employees as well.

SK Bhati informed that any defaulter of House Tax will not only have to pay the remaining amount but also hefty penalties in terms of fines and interests from 2004-05 onwards. What's more, in cases of properties where a property owner has deposited the tax online after self-assessment of their property, there is a great likelihood that the assessment may not be exact, either due to inability of the property owner to understand the various clauses but also due to intention of many to save as much as possible. Whatever the reason, staff of Assessment Department has seldom moved in the colonies with such vigour and promptness as they did recently, going from house to house and issuing notices. RNI has learnt that even those who have been depositing the tax after self-assessment and their names as tax payers are reflecting on the MCD website have been sent notices because the details have not been copied in the manual register in the office of the Assessor & Collector. SK Bhati explained this by saying that even if tax has been deposited online, the tax payer is supposed to personally bring the receipt and show it to the staff in his office who would then write the details on the manual register. Considering the incidents of malpractices and corruption that are commonly heard in offices of public interaction, such a ruling raise eyebrows whether it is the tax payer's fault or that of the MCD that the details of payments that are reflecting on the website have not been copied on the manual register.

Tells a notice, whose copy is available with RNI: "You may bring to our attention any stay/direction from any court with regard to assessment/payment of property tax or having already

filed the PTR alongwith the payment of due tax, failing which it will be presumed that you have nothing to say and, thereafter, the assessment will be finalized on the basis of information available, without further communication to you, thereby precluding you from objecting to any assessment made. You may also be liable for interest or/and penalty in addition to tax, as per provisions of DMC Act.” It is evident the more Governments talk of limiting public-babu meeting in Government offices, the more babus are on lookout for avenues to meet the public, for reasons best known to them.

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