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Delhi rising: A rare opportunity to shape capital's future

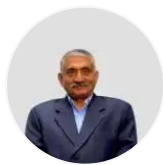
June 9, 2025, 4:28 PM IST / Ajay Khanna in Voices, Delhi, India, TOI

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**Ajay Khanna**

Co-founder, PAFI (Public
Affairs Forum of India) &
Chairman of PAFI
Annual Forum

Delhi, India's historic and political heart, stands at a pivotal moment. For decades, it has been a city of immense potential, rich in culture, talent, and connectivity. However, despite its stature, Delhi today finds itself falling behind neighbouring cities like Gurugram and Noida in terms of infrastructure, housing, and investment.

The slow stagnation has been painful to witness for those of us who have called Delhi home for generations. While

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Gurugram and Noida have become magnets for businesses, startups, and new housing, Delhi's middle class is increasingly priced out of the city. Home ownership for a regular working family has become a distant dream. Many of my peers, friends, former government officials, professionals, and civil servants have had to leave Delhi to find homes in satellite cities, even as their social life and loyalties remain rooted in the capital. I, too, was forced to move to Gurugram—not out of choice, but necessity.

The real issue isn't a lack of land; it's a lack of coordinated development. Delhi spans 1,483 square km, yet only 703 of these are developed. This leaves nearly 783 square km of untapped potential—urban land that could be harnessed for planned growth, housing, infrastructure, and economic activity. The key to unlocking this lies in two powerful policy tools: the Master Plan for Delhi 2041 (MPD 2041) and the Land Pooling Policy (LPP).

Together, these tools provide a visionary but practical roadmap for the capital. If executed well, the LPP could release 20,000 to 25,000 acres of land—enough to create over 2 million homes for 8 million people. This transformative opportunity presents itself for Delhi, which desperately needs affordable and inclusive housing.

For the first time in recent memory, there's alignment across the four major institutions that govern Delhi: the elected

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Delhi government, the Lieutenant Governor's office, the Union government, and the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD). This rare political and administrative consensus offers us a unique opportunity to act decisively and collaboratively.

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What could this future look like?

First, it means homes for all. The LPP can significantly increase the supply of residential units, ease price pressures, and make homeownership more accessible to working families, young professionals, and even retirees. Instead of being forced to relocate to Noida or Gurugram, Delhiites could once again live affordably within their own city.

Second, this policy would boost economic activity. Large-scale development will require the construction of roads, schools, public transport, health facilities, and commercial hubs, each generating jobs and opportunities across construction, logistics, real estate, education, and services. In essence, this is not just a housing policy; it's an economic stimulus with long-term implications.

Third, it ensures dignity for Delhi's village communities. Many of these villages are situated on valuable land but have been neglected due to unplanned development and a lack of infrastructure. This has led to the rise of unauthorised colonies and increased inequality. Under the LPP, landowners become

stakeholders in the city's progress, benefiting from structured development and a share in the value created.

It's important to note that we are not starting from scratch. Delhi has already laid the groundwork through policy design, consultations, and pilot efforts. The blueprint is in place. What's needed now is rapid, transparent, and accountable implementation.

We have examples to draw from. Over the past decade, Gurugram has added over 50 million square feet of office space, transforming itself into a corporate and commercial hub. Noida is quickly becoming a model for integrated townships, logistics parks, and digital innovation. Delhi, with its legacy infrastructure and central location, has every advantage—what it needs now is momentum.

This is not just a city planning exercise; it's a question of Delhi's future. Will it continue to push its workforce, families, and heritage communities to the margins? Or will it rise to become the inclusive, thriving capital its residents deserve?

As citizens, administrators, and policymakers, we must treat this as a now-or-never moment. The convergence of vision, land, and governance is extremely rare in Indian urban planning. Delaying action would not only cost us time but also trust. It would push more

families out of Delhi, deepen inequality, and lock up billions in idle land value.

But the alternative is inspiring. We can build a Delhi that's affordable and aspirational—a city that offers stability to the middle class, opportunity to the youth, and dignity to its village communities. A city where planning is proactive, not reactive; where growth is inclusive, not exclusionary. With MPD 2041 and the LPP, we have the means to create such a future—not decades from now, but in the coming years.

Delhi is waiting—for action, for leadership, and for belief. This is our moment to act. Let's do it in a timeframe, because *"Yeh hai Dilli meri Jaan!"*

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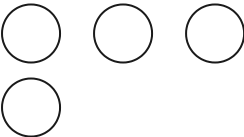
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