

Open spaces shrinking in city

It's a matter of grave concern, says environmentalist Yellappa Reddy

Swathi Shivanand

BANGALORE: This newspaper received a letter that read: "My name is Ram, a 13-year-old student staying in LIC Colony, Jeevan Bima Nagar. There is a large playground that my friends and I use. This is the only open space in the area.

My friends tell me that the Bangalore Development Authority is giving away the land for commercial use. Our parents and the residents' forum have been speaking with a lot of people. But nothing has come about it. Can you help us?"

The letter was received on November 9. On the same day, a five-year-old girl was killed at Valmikinagar when a van ran over her. The girl was playing on the road as there was no open space near her house.

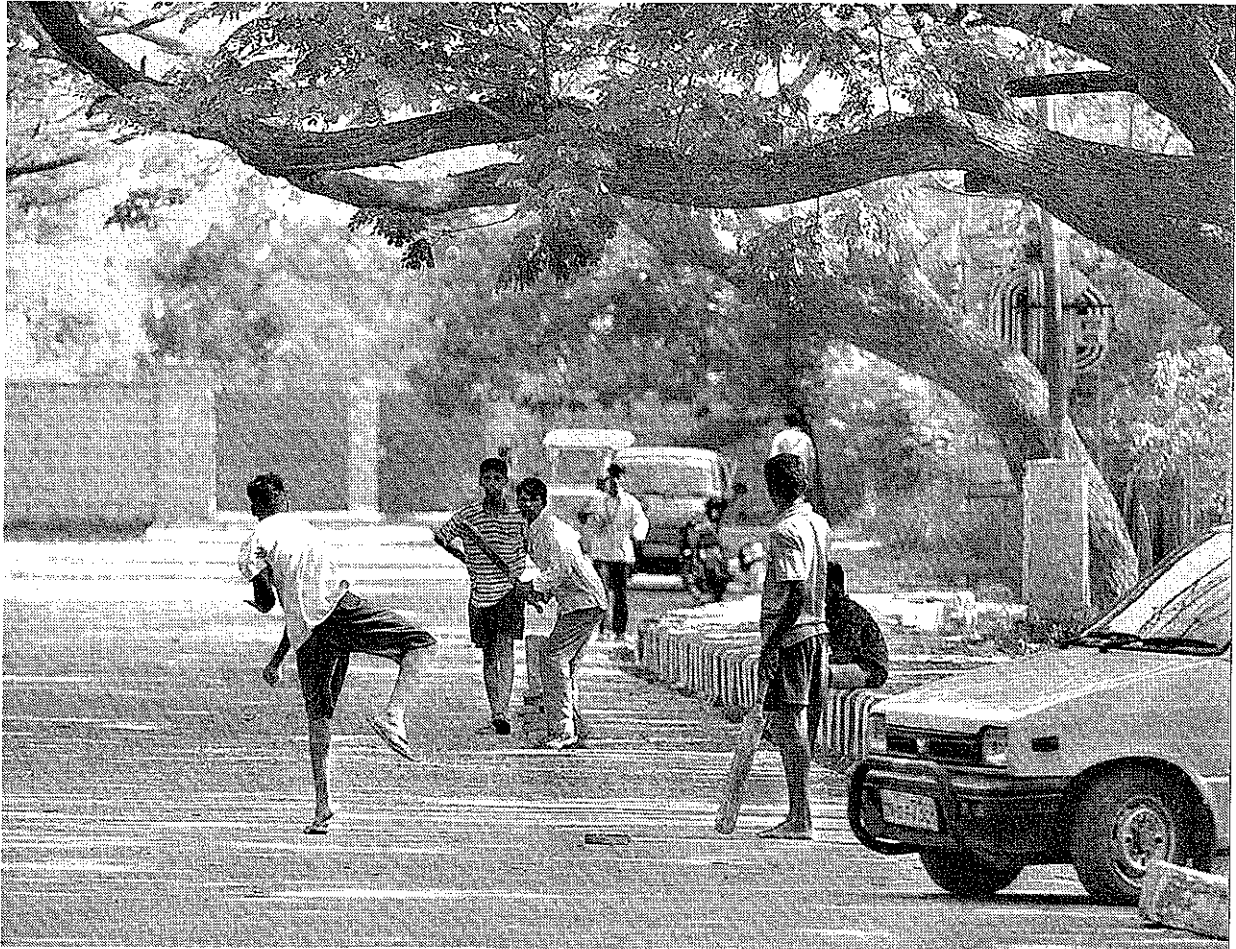
"It is a matter of grave concern that we are losing so many open spaces in the city. They are being used for commercial purposes as the land value is increasing," said Yellappa Reddy, well-known environmentalist.

With apartments replacing houses with courtyards and parks giving way to buildings, open spaces in the city have been steadily declining, says Mr. Reddy.

"When we were children, roads were considered safe to play. We would even play on vacant sites.

But now, there is so much vehicle density even on by-lanes and there are no vacant plots anywhere for children to play," said Bhagya S., a mother.

There are 571 parks in the city and about 140 of them have play equipment for children, says Narayanaswamy, Horticulture Officer. He in-



NO OPTION: With open spaces and vacant sites steadily declining, especially in cities, the road has become a playground for children. - PHOTO: N. SRIDHARAN

• Many open spaces are being used for commercial activity

• Authorities accused of not being serious about developing parks

sists that the parks run by the Bangalore Mahanagara Palike are on the rise. But how serious are the authorities on developing parks?

The former Lokayukta N Venkatachala during his term

cleared the space between the Shivaji statue in Sadashivanagar and the swimming pool. A foundation stone for developing an exclusive children's park was laid. But no work as yet has started there.

Mr. Reddy says the authorities concerned are not serious about developing parks or retaining open spaces.

"Parks run by the corporation remain shut during the day at least till 4 p.m. So, children who return home early from school cannot go out and play there," says Ms. Bhagya. Besides, on weekends there are so many people in the neighbourhood park that my child has to stand in a queue for a chance to play in

the swing. It takes the fun out of play, she says. Does this affect the health of children? Nandhini Mundkur, paediatrician at Bangalore Children's Hospital, thinks so. "Obviously, it would mean that the number of hours children spend watching television increases. With it the tendency to binge also increases. Children become more prone to obesity with no physical exercise taking place," she says.