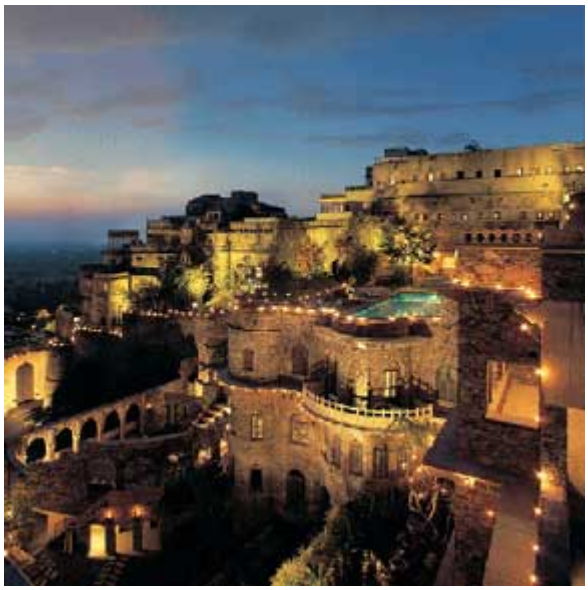
Neemrana`s Green Development

Sangeeta Singh / New Delhi April 01, 2006

If you've recently visited Neemrana after seven-eight years, and looked out of the arched windows of the Neemrana fort-palace hotel on the Delhi-Jaipur highway, you will observe some drastic changes. If you are a nature freak, chances are you may not like the changing skyline with its rows of asbestos and cemented roofs of factories that have sprouted in these last few years.

But you get a different perspective the moment you look out the window in Sankh Group chief executive officer Manoj Sharma's office in the newly constructed Sankh factory. The factory, four kilometers downhill, has a majestic view of the restored fort. Sharma could not have asked for a nicer change from his Gagan Vihar office in East Delhi, which is surrounded by buildings on all sides.

Even while the changing skyline may mean different things to Sharma and other Neemrana frequenters, there is nothing ugly about the growing industries in Neemrana. If you're willing to sacrifice greenery, you may just appreciate the systematic way industries are growing in the 650-acre Neemrana Industrial Area. More than 150 industrial units may crop up in a couple of years to join the 10-odd existing units.



For RICCO (Rajasthan State Industrial Development & Investment Corporation) has already allotted 152 plots to Export industries ranging from cosmetics and jewellery to furniture and auto components in the Export Promotion Industrial Park (EPIP) spread over 210 acres.

Furthermore, tourists can take heart — these units are being developed in a planned manner, and most of them are non-polluting. And if RICCO's proposal of Neemrana Phase III is accepted by the state government, another 1,300 acres of land (double the size of existing Neemrana Industrial Estate) will be developed as a township-like industrial estate, including otherwise lacking public buildings such as hospitals, schools, shopping complexes and recreational centers.

Interestingly, the Rajasthan government's concern for energy conservation and environment protection has meant new units have acquired the most modern technology. Liberty's factory, for instance, has its roof designed in such a way that it gets maximum sunlight so that not a single lamp is required during the day.

"Of course, that makes our production centre a little hot but then we need to maintain a minimum of 30o for our product anyway," says Surekha Sharma, Proprietor, Sankh India.

The company, which is supplying to USA's & European companies, is structurally designed according to European standards. It also has rain harvesting wells on the factory premises, which helps Sankh cut electricity and water costs, and also recycles the same water into two water bodies it is building for beautification purposes.

RIICO's regional manager's office in the sleepy border town of Shahjahanpur is bubbling with activity. "If the government approves our plan, we can start work on Neemrana III," says an official. "This project will have a residential area, industrial units, schools, colleges and medical and commercial centers."

For now, this office is working on Neemrana II and the EPIP. With over 200 plots, the EPIP units will have an export obligation of 33 per cent, and, with a 50 per cent grant from the central government, RIICO is taking care that the estate is well-planned.

"We are making no compromises. The EPIP units will have standardized structures, with proper feeder roads and drainage systems," says a RIICO official. Neemrana II is another 315-acre estate, developed between EPIP and the existing Neemrana Industrial Area.

However, this doesn't suggest that earlier units were not well-planned. A visit to Prerna Syntex, a 100 per cent cotton yarn factory, which was set up 10 years back, suggests mechanization and environmental considerations can go together.

This 2,500-spindle strong company was developed along with a factory and dwelling units for its 200-odd workers who otherwise would be compelled to travel from Behror, the nearest town, or build shanties themselves around the area.

Neighboring Ginni International, a cotton yarn and hosiery manufacturing unit, and also the first industrial unit in the region, provides family houses for staff and dormitories for workers, besides maintaining an extensive green coverage. Compare this with Delhi's Wazirpur or Faridabad's industrial area and it becomes clear that industrialization doesn't have to be a dirty word.

However, Neemrana Industrial Area president, Pramod Kumar, feels that RIICO can do more. "There is a lack of recreational centers and hospitals in the region; power is several times more expensive compared to similar estates in states like Gujarat; the talk about a gas pipeline has been going on for years, and so on," says Kumar.

Six Italians from SACMI working at Liberty are staying at a hotel 16 km away in Behror and each time they want a decent outing they go to the fort-palace. While Sharma isn't worried about this so much, his concern at the moment is high gas prices.

"We are currently paying Rs 37.5 a kilo for gas. Once we have the CNG pipeline, we will be paying around Rs 10 a kilo," he says. Abhay Jain, president, Prerna Syntex goes a step further. "The government isn't building decent schools and clinics. With the turnover rate already high in our industry, we're losing labour to other industrial estates," he says.

RIICO officials say that an eight-acre piece of land has been allotted to Parle Biscuits — a landmark factory in that location as you can smell the biscuits from a kilometer away — for a senior school and another 25 acres to St Margaret School to start an engineering college.

Though lands have been allotted for a hospital, a commercial complex and a hotel, there is no trace of them. RIICO officials promise all of these and more in the second and third phase.

However, what remains to be seen is whether RIICO will be able to combine amenities, standardization of units and modern best practices in these estates. With the intrinsic advantage of being right on the Delhi-Jaipur highway, will it be able to lead other industrial estates?