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No shelter for Delhi poor, as yet

Even as Delhi witnessed a preview of its harsh winter recently, the New Delhi Municipal Council has not yet come up with a single night shelter, so far. To make matters worse for the city's poor and homeless, the 64-odd night shelters that were being maintained by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi's Slum and Jhuggi-Jhopdi department last year, have also not started functioning yet.

This department has now been transferred to the Delhi government.

"Running these shelters is the Delhi government's responsibility now," said a senior Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) official.

The 64-odd shelters can accommodate 10,000 people.

Delhi chief secretary Rakesh Mehta said since it is the first time that the Board will be running these shelters, they are being provided with adequate resources. "A meeting was held last week to decide on the course of action. They will have to be provided field organisations to maintain these shelters. We will be opening them shortly," Mehta added.

Till last year, there was a lone night shelter for women in the New Delhi area. It had 17 rooms and could accommodate 150 women. The men, however, had nowhere to go.

In 2009, the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) had one night shelter on AK Roy Marg but even that has now been converted into a school, following court orders.

According to the civic body, it is trying to chalk out a plan to turn another building into a night shelter. "Right now, we don't have a night shelter. We will try to do something before

December,” said a senior NDMC official.

However, NGOs working for homeless persons say the civic body doesn't even allow them to put up tents for the homeless during winters.

“When we tried to put up tents near Connaught Place last year, the NDMC removed it,” said Paramjeet Kaur, director, Ashray Adhikar Abhiyan, an NGO that works for the rights of the city's homeless.