

‘OPEN SPACES HELP SOCIAL NETWORKING’

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Imagine being able to walk or cycle from Malad to Colaba or Chembur to south Mumbai along well-maintained walking-and-cycling tracks, with gardens and parks to view or rest in along the way. Maybe you could even stop by a beach. Sounds unreal, especially in a city like Mumbai, which offers an abysmal amount of open space to its 12.4 million residents.

But this is one of the longer-term goals of the Open Mumbai plan being promoted by city architect P K Das and his team, who seek to change the way Mumbai deals with open spaces. The plan may sound fanciful but a year of research, documentation, mapping and collating statistics has gone into developing a vision that seeks to place “people and community life at the centre of planning, not real estate and construction potential”.

The team has mapped a variety of open spaces and other green zones across the city, in the bargain concluding that Mumbai sprawls across 482.7 square kilometres and not 437, as commonly cited. The team has concluded that an incredible 43%, or 208.2 sq km, of Mumbai includes green zones like gardens, playgrounds, encroached open spaces, no-development zones, lakes, wetlands and beaches. Much of this can be developed as public spaces or at least protected from land sharks; mangroves, for example, could have boardwalks for viewing or strolls.

The plan seeks to link neighbourhoods to parks, walking tracks, beaches and promenades. “It seeks to network open spaces in a way that enables and nurtures social networking. Disparate open spaces, disparate activity, disparate public life can be integrated into a comprehensive whole,” Das says. “The quality of public spaces a city offers its residents is a reflection of the



WHERE'S MY PLAYGROUND? A bird's-eye view of the Andheri-Malad area shows high-rises and slums battling for space and just a small barren patch of land that could serve as a recreation area

residents' dignity and quality of life.”

An example of how an area can be interlinked is in the Juhu Vision Plan, which seeks to integrate the beach with playgrounds, walking and cycling tracks. Authorities have already begun building tracks along the Irla Nullah with MPLAD funds given by Javed Akhtar.

Overall, Das's team calls for amendments and provisions to be included in the Development Plan and Development Control Regulations to facilitate a makeover in Mumbai. The plan calls for an Open Mumbai Board, made up of governmental agencies and citizens' groups, to prepare a comprehensive plan for developing open spaces, “thereby improving the quality of life and environment of the city”.

Roadblocks cleared for Juhu ‘city forest’



After a seven-year-long battle with a private agency, members of Save Open Spaces (SOS), a Juhu citizens group, succeeded in saving a vital recreation ground plot, earmarked as a ‘city forest’ at JVPD scheme. It was former municipal commissioner S S Tinaikar's vision.

The plot is adjacent to Vidyanihi High School at JVPD scheme. Citizens had made a last-ditch effort to

Get the Plot

- In 2004, citizens started a battle to save an 18-acre Juhu plot earmarked as ‘city forest’
- In Jan 2011, a delegation met civic chief Subodh Kumar
- In March 2011, Kumar approved a proposal to cancel Ronson Foundation's lease, which had been given on a caretaker basis
- In Aug 2011, BMC gave its nod to take possession of plot

This is a major win for residents who were fighting a losing battle since 2004. We hope this will restore the city forest as visualized

Ashoke Pandit | MEMBER, SAVE OPEN SPACES IN JUHU

save the plot on January 18, 2011, and met municipal commissioner Subodh Kumar. Citizens submitted a design plan, which was approved by civic authorities.

The design plan includes growing a forest alongside the Irla nullah, building walking and cycling tracks, introducing cultural spaces such as a small amphitheatre, an art exhibition centre, children's play area and a garden.

First Pasta Lane walks up the garden path

The struggle was probably as long and difficult as the task to transform an encroached space into a lush garden. After a long court battle and follow-ups with the BMC and government agen-

cies, First Pasta Lane of Colaba finally got a green lung. It all began 23 years ago with a residents' movement against an eatery's kitchen, a godown and a garage that had encroached upon municipal

plots earmarked as gardens and a recreational ground. The movement lost momentum later and was revived in 2006 when the First Pasta Lane Residents' Association, through an RTI query, found out that the eatery stood on a BMC plot.

Residents followed up with the BMC for over two years and the kitchen was demolished. Preparations to create the garden started in December 2009, said Vijay Advani, joint secretary of the First Pasta Lane Residents' Association.

Pasta Perfect

- 23 years ago, Colaba residents first raised their voice against an eatery's kitchen, a godown and a garage that had encroached upon municipal plots earmarked as gardens and a ground
- In 2008, BMC demolished the eatery's kitchen; preparations to create the garden started in December 2009 and it was thrown open to the public in 2010

New mayor wants a clean, beautiful and secure city

Independents & Allies Help Prabhu Win; MNS Absent

Sukhada Tatke & Shawan Sen | TNN

The Shiv Sena, along with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and other alliance partners got a saintly elected as the first citizen of the country's richest municipal corporation for the fourth successive time on Friday. This came after the bonhomie between the Sena and Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) in Thane extended to the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), with all 28 MNS corporators remaining absent.

Senior Sena member Sunil Prabhu (42), who has held several important portfolios in the party, won with a majority of 125 votes garnered from his party, the BJP, Republican Party of India, Akhil Bharatiya Sena and Bharipa Bahujan Mahasangh. All 15 independents, including rebels Vishnu Gaikwad and Vijay Tandel (both Congress) and Cyril D'Souza (Nationalist Congress Party), voted for the Sena.

Sunil More, a Congress-NCP nominee and staunch Narayan Rane supporter, secured 65 votes and it appeared that the combine did not do much to garner the independents' support.

Prabhu iterated his agenda to fulfill promises made in the party manifesto. “I want a clean, beautiful and a secure Mumbai. I am aware that the city has many challenges to deal with. I want to improve the healthcare sector, roads, water supply and security,” said Prabhu.

The deputy mayor, too, is

Borivli, secured 122 votes, while his rival, Harun Khan (NCP), got 65 votes.

The process went on for over six hours as each corporator voted by a show of hand and then stood up to announce the name of the candidate s/he was voting for. Cheering on from the balcony of the House were Shiv Sena CEO



FIRST CITIZEN: Sunil Prabhu with deputy mayor Mohan Mithbaonkar

Aditya's history prof nominated

St Xavier's College assistant professor Avkash Jadhav got a call four days ago from Aditya Thackeray, grandson of Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray, asking for his resume. He later got a call from Sena CEO Uddhav Thackeray offering him a nominated corporator's post in the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation. It was a “pleasant surprise” for Jadhav, who has taught Aditya for two years. Jadhav's interaction with Aditya was not restricted to the classroom. “We had lively discussions even outside. He is a down-to-earth person with a vision,” said Jadhav, who teaches history and has a keen interest in social service. From presenting research papers, Jadhav's focus in the BMC will be education. “I see this as a platform to work for the city rather than a ward,” he said. Aditya said, “The idea is to bring in more vibrancy to the corporation.” —Shawan Sen

from the saffron alliance. Mohan Mithbaonkar (BJP), from the party's stronghold in

Uddhav Thackeray, son Aditya Thackeray, BJP leader Vinod Tawde and RPI leader

Ramdas Athavle.

Thackeray later said that the Sena, BJP, RPI worked together to get the numbers. “The independents believe in our agenda. Thirteen independents had given their written support to the alliance,” he said.

Nine Samajwadi Party members too abstained. The last mayoral election also saw six MNS members being absent and seven SP members abstaining.

Political observers said the MNS has always silently supported the Sena whenever needed. “This time, the MNS needs the Sena's support for the Nashik mayor's post,” an observer said.

This is the first general body meeting in many years where new and young faces outnumbered the old.

Many new members were both anxious and excited. A woman was seen rehearsing her ‘I vote for’ speech minutes before her turn.

Another heaved a sigh of relief once she announced her vote and asked her neighbour if she sounded okay.

But the highlight was when Sena leader Uddhav Thackeray descended from the balcony to the main hall and many new corporators took out their mobile phones and ran towards him to get a photo clicked. Many of them were Congress and NCP corporators.

The five new nominated councillors are Ashwin Vyas (BJP), Avakash Jadhav, Mahiraj Shaikh (both Shiv Sena), Parul Mehta (Congress) and Girish Dhanorkar (MNS).

Now, cabbies threaten strike from March 19

Manthan K Mehta | TNN

Mumbai: Nearly 35,000 taxis have threatened to go on an indefinite strike from March 19 to demand an increase in fares due to revision in the prices of compressed natural gas (CNG).

A L Quadros, general secretary, Mumbai Taximen's Union (MTU), said, “The Mumbai Metropolitan Regional Transport Authority (MMRTA) cancelled two meetings with the union to discuss the fare hike. If they continue to take our demands lightly, we will have no option but to go on strike.” In a proposal to MMRTA, the taximen's union has sought an increase in minimum fares from Rs 16 to Rs 20 and for every additional kilometre from Rs 10 to Rs 12. On February 17, Mahanagar Gas Ltd increased CNG prices by Rs 1.63 per kg.

Auto union leader Sharad Rao has demanded a hike from Rs 11 to Rs 16.

3 officials shifted

Mumbai: The state government on Friday transferred three IAS officers: J S Saharia, additional chief secretary, relief and rehabilitation, was shifted to the school education department; Vijay Suryavanshi, private secretary to cabinet minister Harshavardhan Patil, was appointed joint CEO, MIDC; and Bhandara district collector P B Kalbhor was named Gondia collector. TNN

Cross Maidan gets a clean, mean look



Before



After

It was a long-drawn battle for residents of Churchgate to get the authorities to take note of four acres of Cross Maidan that had turned into a no-man's land. The space that was encroached upon and rendered absolutely unusable became a sanctuary for residents in June 2010. Nearly four acres of Cross Maidan near Churchgate at one end of Fashion Street was thrown open to public.

For years, the patch had become a cradle for hutments and fences were broken. Residents recall it as a virtual “dumping ground”.

The Organisation for Verdant Ambience and Land (Oval) Trust conceptualized the project's beautification. The plot now has a large expanse of trees, lawns, walking tracks and benches for seniors.

The Cross Maidan garden was handed over to the Oval Trust in 2006. At that time, it was discovered that the government resolution (GR) did not include more than an acre of the southern edge of the ground hawkers had encroached upon. “The process of getting another GR for that space took many years, and this area was handed over to the trust in October 2009. The entire procedure was lengthy but we kept going,” said Nayana Kathpalia, one of the trustees of the Oval Trust.

“Even after the plot was handed over to us, the government gave it without clearing the encroachments. In fact, even now there is a commercial office functioning in the garden which needs to be cleared,” Kathpalia said.

It has benefited the whole community.

Because of the kitchen, there was a lot of pollution. But now, we have a long stretch of open space, which is unusual in Mumbai. We have greenery and a garden. Neighbouring slumdwellers also use it

Dilip Mehrotra | A RESIDENT

Cross-Over To Beauty

- For years, Cross Maidan remained encroached upon, its fences were broken and it was rendered unusable
- The maidan's beautification was conceptualized by the Organisation for Verdant Ambience and Land (Oval) Trust
- In June 2010, nearly four acres of the new-improved maidan were thrown open to the public
- The plot now has a large expanse of trees, lawns, walking tracks as well as benches for senior citizens

It took us years to get the govt to pay heed to this plot. Now, Cross Maidan garden must be taken as an example of how a haven can be created with consistent efforts.

The govt must ideally do its work and then seek citizens' help

Nayana Kathpalia | TRUSTEE, OVAL TRUST

We used the ground as one of the venues for Kala Ghoda festival. A gate must be made at the Veer Nariman Road end to attract more visitors. The encroached ground is cleared. It is an example of how a dump yard can be converted into a green haven

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