

A Plan To Turn Waterfronts Into Scenic Leisure Spots & A Slumdwellers' Initiative To Help The Needy Are Lauded For Improving Life In Mumbai

PROVIDING THE CITY A SEA-FRONT CHANGE

FROM SPORTS CLUB TO SOCIAL CHAMPIONS

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

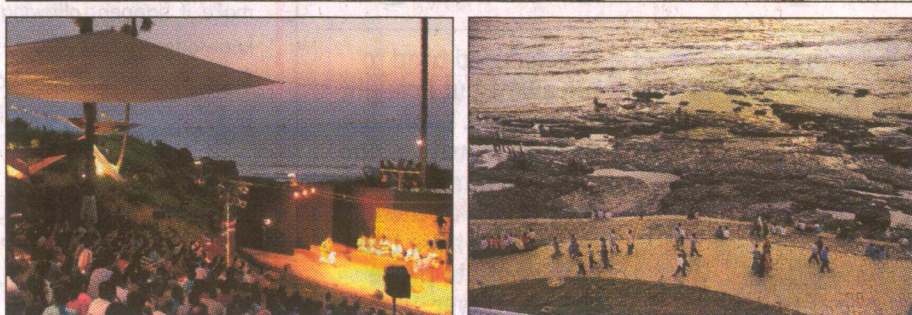
Mumbai: When a lackadaisical city government allowed one of its biggest assets—the waterfronts—to deteriorate into dumpyards and be used as open-air toilets, a determined group of citizens thought it was time to take charge. Over the last six years, thanks largely to a citizens' initiative, about seven kilometres of Mumbai's western waterfronts have been reclaimed and turned into what architect P K Das calls the city's "cultural forecourts".

On Thursday, this perseverance finally paid off when the Mumbai Waterfront Improvement Centre (MWIC), a recently registered trust, shared the \$100,000 Deutsche Bank Urban Age Award with another organisation for helping "transform the lives of Mumbai's citizens".

Das, one of the four trustees who received the award on behalf of the MWIC, has been largely credited with transforming Bandra Land's End and the Bandstand and Carter Road promenades, as well as the 4-km stretch of Juhu beach. He has done all this with the active support of resident associations and funds from local MPs.

A maverick housing activist, Das said he faced threats of physical violence when food stalls that had encroached on Juhu beach were sought to be relocated. "Our waterfronts are now unbarricaded public spaces, which are truly open and democratic in nature," he told TOI after receiving a Rs 20 lakh cheque, the MWIC's share of the award.

Civic activist and co-trustee of the MWIC, Darryl D'Monte, who has been in the forefront of maintaining the two Bandra promenades, said, "It has been sometimes a long and painful struggle



PUTTING A SHINE ON OUR SHORES: The Bandstand promenade is a popular evening haunt for people from across Mumbai. (Above left) At the Khar end, the Carter Road promenade is designed to project into the rocks. (Above right) Strollers at Carter Road. (Below, from left) Actress and MP Shabana Azmi, Deutsche Bank chairman Josef Ackerman, architect P K Das and his MWIC colleague with their Rs 20 lakh cheque

to get these projects going. Very often we have to do so in spite of the authorities. Six years after the inception of the two promenades in Bandra, we are facing opposition from the Maharashtra Maritime Board, which thinks it owns these public properties."

D'Monte accused the board of refusing the citizens' association permission to repair the sea walls, repave the structures and remove unauthorised encroachments.

The MWIC plans to utilise the prize money for its plan for the Dadar-Prabhadevi

beach, which is 4km long and suffers from erosion. "The plan aims to check the erosion and to regain the beach for public use in one of the most congested areas of the island city," said the MWIC.

The Versova waterfront is the other project that Das plans to take up. The centre also proposes to survey and map water bodies, rivers, creeks and seafronts so it can plan public spaces.

THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS

- Helped build the Carter Road promenade at Bandra, transforming what was a neglected and encroached seafront into a lively place for the public
- Similarly helped transform the Bandstand promenade
- Spruced up Land's End, where Bandra fort stood, and built an amphitheatre there
- Helped spruce up Juhu beach, especially by relocating ugly and intrusive food stalls to a proper food court

ON THE ANVIL

- A plan to reinvigorate the Dadar-Prabhadevi beach, which is 4km long and suffers from erosion. The MWIC wants the public to use the beach again
- Reviving and sprucing up the Versova waterfront
- Proposal to study, survey and map rivers, creeks, other water bodies and seafronts so more public spaces can be created
- Hold workshops, spread information

THE GOAL: TO OPEN UP OUR WORLD

The Mumbai Waterfront Improvement Committee (MWIC) was registered as a trust only a couple of months ago, but it has been involved in transforming the city for several years now. Its main aim is to create places along waterfronts, and maybe even other water bodies, for the public to relax and snatch much-needed moments of leisure.

"The 44 kilometres of the western coast have never been considered in the planning and development process as an integral part of the city's land. On the contrary, the waterfronts have been constantly abused by reclamation, sewage disposal and encroachment. Yet, for the millions who live in our crowded city, the waterfronts are the only major open spaces—whether it is Marine Drive or Chowpatty, Haji Ali or Worli Seaface, Dadar beach or Bandra Bandstand, Carter Road or Juhu beach, or Versova," states the project description of the MWIC.

The MWIC has plans to revive the 4-km Dadar-Prabhadevi beach, which is facing erosion. The team wants the public in one of the most congested parts of the island city to have an outlet for socialising, strolling and relaxing. Sprucing up the Versova waterfront and other proposals are also in the pipeline.

Archana Sharma | TNN

Mumbai: It started out as a group found in most slums. Boys hanging out at a naka started a sports club, or kreedamandal, to host cricket matches and carrom contests. Organising night matches, Ganeshotsav and Ambedkar Jayanti programmes in the Bhimwada-Khotwadi slums of Santa Cruz were the only activities they indulged in.

Sixteen years later, Triratna Prerana Mandal, which operates from above a public toilet, has become the co-winner of the \$100,000 Deutsche Bank Urban Age Award, instituted to recognise successful citizens' initiatives.

The focus of the unemployed lads changed because of this one toilet. The public toilet was unlike a Sulabh Sauchalaya. It was like a community toilet built by Mhada or the BMC for slumdwellers who waited in long queues, tin cans in hand. "It was dirty, never cleaned; children squatted outside the toilet. We grew up using such a toilet," recalled Dayanand Jadhav, the mandal's executive president.

In 1999, a BMC officer approached the group about adopting the toilet on a caretaker basis and after learning all about the World Bank-funded Slum Sanitation Scheme the men took up the challenge of turning the toilet around.

Full of pride, today Jadhav shows off a clean, 18-seat toilet surrounded by a small and beautiful garden that was once



a dumping ground. Around 74 slum families have bought yearly passes for Rs 120 each to be able to use the toilet. Passers-by pay Rs 2.

Triratna Prerana Mandal can be dubbed the 'toilet NGO' because, from the premises above the toilet, it runs a computer institute for slum children and prepares 150kg of khichdi daily for the government's mid-day meal scheme.

While the mandal has won Rs 20 lakh, it also earned the distinction of being the only contender out of the 74 to apply for the prize in Hindi. "That's the only language, apart from Marathi, we know. We wouldn't have been able to express our achievement in English. I am surprised we were the only ones to apply in Hindi," said Jadhav.

THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS

- Turned a filthy community toilet into a clean, 18-seat facility. 74 slum families have passes of Rs 120 a year to use the toilet
- Dumping ground around toilet was turned into a garden
- Started garbage segregation in the slum and some neighbourhood societies. Ragpickers earn a living by selling dry waste
- Opened a computer institute for slum children. The three-month basic course is affiliated to Pune University
- Mahila wing cooks khichdi for the mid-day meal scheme

ON THE ANVIL

- To add 20 computers to the institute
- Introduce fun learning in the local municipal school with the help of toys and other equipment. Spread awareness about education among parents. Aim is to bring down the dropout rate
- To adopt the nearby Dharmaveer Shambaji ground on a caretaker basis and develop it into a garden.
- Work towards child welfare for street children

COOKING UP SOLUTIONS: WOMEN AT WORK

It's common to find a crowd outside a public toilet early in the morning, but the real activity at this toilet in Bhimwada-Khotwadi is up on the roof. Around nine women are busy preparing khichdi in vessels, each of which are big enough to hold a person. Some days they make laapsi (porridge).

The food is transported to various anganwadis in the city. "The government pays up only four months later. But people are generous in loaning us the amount," said Deepa Mohite, one of the 45 women of the mandal's self-help group. For three hours of work a day, the women get Rs 750 per month. "I know women whose husbands drink their salaries away. Now they buy a gold mangalsutra out of the money they get here. It's very satisfying," Mohite added. The women work in five shifts. At night, they sift the daal for stones and soak the porridge oats. In the morning, around 150kg of khichdi is cooked.



CHANGING COURSE, CHANGING LIVES: (Top) The sports club opened a computer institute. (Above) Women prepare to cook khichdi for school kids. (Below, from left) Governor S M Krishna, a member of the winning mandal, mandal officer Dayanand Jadhav with the Rs 20 lakh cheque and German chancellor Angela Merkel

The idea to apply was given by civic official Seema Redkar, who Jadhav credits with helping the group metamorphosise from a youth club to a serious NGO. "All the boys got married and as we matured we wanted to do something worthwhile. Then Seema Madam began pushing for slum upliftment," said Dayanand Mohite, who works with Jet Airways. All 15 members work.

The NGO is run on part-time efforts. The mandal has plans for the future. "We want

literacy for everyone in the slums. We need 20 more computers for the institute," Jadhav said.

They have already asked the BMC to allow them to get involved in a local school to bring down the dropout rate. "We will introduce learning methods," he said. There are many more projects. As the mandal's treasurer said, "Without money we could do so much, so with Rs 20 lakh you can imagine how much more we can work."



WHAT THEY PLAN TO DO WITH THE MONEY

WHAT THEY PLAN TO DO WITH THE MONEY

Aside from spending on teaching aids at the municipal school, the mandal also wants to improve literacy. It plans to add 20 computers to its institute, which now has seven machines. As the treasurer said, "Without money we could do so much, so with Rs 20 lakh you can imagine how much more we can work."