

NGO, not developer, will construct slum project

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Mumbai: Nagari Nivara Hakk Samiti, an NGO fighting for housing rights under the leadership of actress and MP, Shabana Azmi, will be building India's largest rehabilitation project for the urban poor at Chandivli. As many as 16,500 families displaced from the Borivli national park will be accommodated in a township to be developed on 1.89 lakh sq. metres of land.

General secretary of the Samiti P.K. Das, who is an architect, told TNN on Wednesday that the project will be undertaken by the Samiti and not by Sumer corporation to whom the land belongs. He said following a PIL filed by environmentalists about 65,000 families who had encroached on the national park had to be moved out. Of them, 33,000 families were entitled to rehabilitation since their huts existed prior to 1995. As per the policy of the Maharashtra government, those occupying pre-1995 structures were eligible to alternate accommodation.

Mr Das said Sumer Corporation approached the Samiti with an offer to give 1.89 sq. metres of its land at Chandivli, which was earlier used for quarrying, for rehabilitating 16,500 families. The balance area of 1.24 lakh sq. metres owned by the firm was in the no-development zone. "In return, the company would get transfer of development rights (TDR) that it could sell in the open market. The TDR is being given strictly as per government policy under the slum rehabilitation act and there is absolutely no illegality involved," he maintained. The entire project is transparent, he noted.

The township project will cost about Rs 420 crores. Each of the 16,500 families will contribute Rs 25,000 and the remaining amount will be given by Sumer corporation. The township will consist of 14 schools, two hospitals, six places of worship, 700 shops, two community halls, 180 welfare centres, 180 balwadis, a four-acre maidan and 26 neighbourhood open spaces.

When pointed out that the MMRDA had earlier rejected this plot for the rehabilitation of slum-dwellers since it had huge craters, Mr Das said with proper filling this land could be used for constructing the township. "The cost will go up because of the filling that is needed, but technically it is possible to build on this land," he noted. Mr Das said the project proposal would be jointly submitted by the NGO and the state government to the high court which is hearing the PIL.

Mr Das and Shabana Azmi made a power point presentation of the project to chief minister Sushilkumar Shinde here on Monday. Referring to the stay granted by Mr Shinde to the release of TDR to Sumer corporation, Mr Das said the CM, who had taken charge barely a fortnight ago, wanted to study the project thoroughly before taking a final decision. Hence he has temporarily stayed the grant of TDR pending an intra-department review, he noted. Asked about the huge profits that Sumer corporation stands to make by selling the TDR, Mr Das said the gain accruing to the developer was bound to be huge since the land being used for slum rehabilitation is vast. "The important thing to note is that there is total transparency in the project," he observed.