



DEEPAK TURBHEKAR

● Activists fear places such as the Priyadarshini Park will lose some area to construction under the proposed zone change

BMC's zone switch will shrink open spaces: Activists

Civic body wants to re-classify the areas from CRZ II to CRZ III. Greens say the new category doesn't bar all construction

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On the face of it, the BMC's proposal to bring Mumbai's precious open spaces under a new zonal classification that offers greater protection from encroachers and the builder lobby seems to be a novel idea. But a careful examination of the plan reveals that it may actually shrink the spaces—a nightmare scenario for a city that has only 0.09 sq mt of open area per citizen.

Environmentalists have raised serious objections to the draft Coastal Zone Management Plan which proposes to re-categorise parks, gardens, and playgrounds from Coastal Regulatory Zone (CRZ) II to III, which permits certain type of construction on open spaces.

All the places that come under CRZ III are "no-development zones", meaning no commercial or residential building can come up there. But a clause grants floor space index (FSI) of up to 15 per cent there for construction of civic amenities, a stadium, a gym and other facilities for recreational or sport-related activities.

The greens say any such structure will essentially reduce the size of open spaces, which are already under pressure from unscrupulous developers, politicians, and encroachers.

"If I understand the notification correctly, it is an outright depletion of open spaces under the pretext of preserving them. They are using an NDZ [no development zone] cover to allow 15 per cent construction on open spaces and it is a clever manipulation," said architect PK Das, who had mapped open spaces in Mumbai.

"Under Development Control Regulations, open spaces cannot be touched and according to DP 2034, 90 per cent of them fall in CRZ II. Most of them are in developed areas. There are few open spaces on the periphery."

Activists are particularly concerned about how the BMC defines civic amenities. Community halls, welfare centres, auditoriums, schools, colleges, and hospitals could also be included in the broad term.

"A stadium and a gymnasium is a commercial structure. There will be sale of tickets, advertising, and sponsorship. They [BMC] will not allow clubs, malls or office buildings, but other constructions could be permitted," Das said.

An official with the state environment department said it was for the first time that a stipulation allowing some construction had been included in a plan meant to protect open spaces.

A senior official with the BMC's Development Plan department tried to allay activists' concerns, saying 15 per cent construction would not be allowed without the Maharashtra Coastal Zone Management Authority's approval. "The construction should be of ancillary use to open spaces. It could be toilet blocks, stadiums, and gymnasium that will fit under 15 per cent FSI bracket," the official said.

But Ashok Ravat, an executive committee member of NAGAR, an NGO fighting to preserve open spaces, said the proposal to re-classify open spaces under CRZ III would shrink the city's green cover by 15 per cent. "This is contrary to the intention of Environment Protection Act," he said.

A BMC plan to help builders?

Environmentalist D Stalin of NGO Vanashakti said the civic body's proposal was the first step towards opening up all no-go areas in CRZ for construction. "Look at how Aarey Colony was included as NDZ and the zonation was changed," he said.

"They are empowering builders to make modifications and carry out construction. The NDZ tag means nothing — it's only on paper. They are opening doors for future development. We will argue against it when we are called for a hearing."

The draft Coastal Zone Management Plan was uploaded on the civic body's website recently. An official said suggestions and objections were invited on May 12, and a public hearing would be conducted soon.

Currently, Mumbai has 8,710 acres of open spaces. This does not include Aarey Colony and the Sanjay Gandhi National Park.

Aarey loses land again, this time to Force One

GR hands over 2.27 acre plot from Aarey to the elite anti-terror outfit, which had been given 98.6 acres previously, for its HQ

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After giving several chunks of land from Aarey colony for Mumbai Metro 3 and Mumbai Metro 7, the state government has given yet another plot of land to the elite Force One, the anti-terror outfit that was set up after the 26/11.

A Government Resolution (GR) was issued by the Dairy Development Department on Thursday to that effect. The Force One has been granted a plot measuring 2.27 acres in Unit no 28 near Nakshatra garden.

The GR said that the Force One was given a plot of 98.6 acres to build its headquarters, but the Force One officers returned to the state government stating that the area was overlapping with the Bombay Veterinary College.

The Special Inspector General of Force One had made a specific request asking for an additional plot of land. A meeting was first held for this on August 23, 2016 and since then many meetings have been held before the order was issued on Thursday.

An officer of the state Dairy Development Department, who did not wish to be named, said, "Aarey colony is being treated as a land bank and whoever wants land for whatever purpose is being given chunks of it."

"The state home department has land at Kalina and it could be given to Force One, instead of the green belt of Aarey colony," the officer added.

It was carved out in 1970s by taking huge chunks of the Borivali National Park jungle.

The Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation has also asked for 100-acre land for a bird park and to develop it as a tourist centre. On June 30, 2017, the managing director of the MTDC had written a letter to the revenue secretary, Manukumar Srivastava asking for the land.

The state has already given land for the Metro 3 car shed, for labour camps of Metro 7 and for a Metro Bhavan.

D Stalin of NGO Vanashakti said, "Force One has been given 100 acres of land, even though they need 50 acres. This is open distribution of green patches as if there is no other place in the city. This only confirms that this government will destroy Aarey for all kinds of reasons."

Aarey Colony is being treated as a land bank and whoever wants land for whatever purpose is being given chunks of it. The state home department has land at Kalina and it could be given to Force One, instead of the green belt of Aarey

-An officer from the Dairy Development department

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