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Civic Round-Up

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Bongirwar's good deeds

Mr. Arun Bongirwar handed over charge of the Municipal Commissioner to Mr. D. Mehta on Monday. He has however left a mark on this city and will always be remembered for his contributions to the city, especially the Bibvewadi-Dhankawadi rehabilitation scheme for slum dwellers.

In the next few months, this major scheme will be completed. Two years ago no one was willing to believe that such a gigantic project of constructing ten thousand houses would ever be launched. The civic authorities were concerned about the pollution of the Mutha right bank canal due to the existence of the thickly populated Janata Vasahat slum.

Pipeline scheme

Plans were prepared for laying a pipeline from Khadakvasla to Parvati Water Works. It involved an estimated expenditure of about Rs. 18 crores, but when the revised plan was submitted, the authorities realised that it may require more than Rs. 35 crores. With increase in population, it was estimated that the pipeline would have to be replaced after a decade or so, to carry additional quantity of water.

Mr. Ram Pradhan, then Chief Secretary and now Secretary in Union Home Ministry was the first to suggest that an alternative and feasible plan should be worked out. Plans for the mass housing scheme were chalked out. Finding land for such a housing scheme was a problem.

Ultimately the authorities selected Dhankawadi-Bibvewadi as the site for the mass housing project. This newspaper had always emphasised that "nothing should be offered free" as civic amenities to the citizens. About a decade ago, the Municipal Corporation had built some houses to provide alternate and better houses for slum dwellers in Yeravada.

Shelved scheme

Each of this small houses costs about Rs. 5000, and the amount was payable in easy instalments in 20 years. There was a demand from the slum dwellers that the houses should be allotted free of cost. The civic authorities could not afford such charity, and hence the project was shelved after building a few houses.

Another similar experiment was launched in Kothrud near the compost plant. This scheme also had to be shelved and ultimately the houses were allotted to municipal teachers. In 1975, the former Mayor Mr. Bhai Vaidya had launched such a scheme in Bibvewadi. It came to be known as "Ota scheme". It had to be cancelled due to lack of cooperation from the slum dwellers who would have been the beneficiaries.

Mr. Bongirwar while launching the scheme had made it clear that the beneficiaries would have to bear the cost of the land, development cost and cost of construction. Thus the civic body could launch a scheme which was estimated to cost about ten crores of rupees.

Mr. Shivaji Deshmukh, then Assistant Municipal Commissioner had played a key role in acquiring nearly 70 hectares of land. Mr. L.N. Kinkar carried out a quick census identifying the residents of the Janata Vasahat and Dias plot slums. The Bank of Maharashtra offered to play the key role in accepting deposits from the beneficiaries.

Mr. Bongirwar was able to impress upon the officers of the Housing and Urban Development Corporation about the feasibility of the scheme and secured the huge loan required for launching the project.

Opposition

Despite severe opposition from a number of corporators, the scheme was launched about two and half years ago. The citizens of Pune must be complimented for whole heartedly supporting the scheme. It was public opinion that ultimately prevailed and the corporators, though reluctantly, accepted the project.

The mass housing scheme, apart from preventing canal water pollution, has helped in decongestion of over populated areas, which was the main objective of the Draft Development Plan. It is one of the best schemes accomplished by the civic body in the last three decades.

This scheme has been lauded by experts in India and abroad. Last week top government officials, including one officer from the Prime Minister's secretariat visited the Dhankawadi-Bibvewadi scheme. The video film recorded at the site has been shown to ministers and officers in Delhi.

The citizens of Pune will ever remain grateful to Mr. Bongirwar for ensuring pollution free drinking water. The beneficiaries of the scheme will always remember him for providing houses in a better environment and for improving their living condition. The environment itself has changed their entire life style. The first thing they have learnt in their houses is to maintain cleanliness, send their children regularly to schools and live a peaceful life. No more brawls over fetching water or quarrels in liquor joints.

Other projects

Mr. Bongirwar had also launched the exclusive cycle network project, water purification plant near Todiwala road, and the Marathe scheme.

The new municipal commissioner Mr. D. Mehta is not a stranger for newsmen. He was the Director General of Information and Public Relations a decade ago. We have heard that on some occasions, he refused to use his official car for private work. It had embarrassed his subordinates who were not familiar with such strict discipline.

Judging from his experience, qualifications and style of working, we are sure that Mr. Mehta will not only pursue the plans but also take up more projects proposed in the Draft Development Plan. For enabling him to pursue the plans, the State government must approve the Draft Development Plan as early as possible without making any alterations or without allowing any concessions in F.S.I. rules.

Delayed plan

A former Urban Development Minister had stated that he wanted to take all M.L.A.s into confidence before approving the Draft Development Plan. For his information, all these M.L.A.s were members of the Pune Municipal Corporation when the plan was drafted. They are fully aware about the plan and there is no need for delaying the plan.

Three chief ministers have come and gone and the state cabinet has been reshuffled more than a pack of cards, but the plan has remained in cold storage. We hope that the Chief

Minister Mr.S.B. Chavan will personally look into this matter and secure the approval of the state legislature so that the plan could be implemented.

By any stretch of imagination, four years are not required for taking six M.L.A.'s into confidence especially when the M.L.A.'s are well aware of all the stages through which the plan underwent.

Hyacinth growth

Water hyacinth has started accumulating in the Mula Mutha river near the Bund Garden (Mahatma Gandhi) garden. People living along the river bank have been facing a severe mosquito menace. Though the quantity of hyacinth near the bund is not much, it may take a only few days for the entire water surface to be covered by the dreaded weed.

If only the water outlet was closed for a few hours, water level will sufficiency rise and the hyacinth will spill over the bund. This seems to be a better way to control the growth of hyacinth in the initial stage. One wonders why the civic authorities wait till the weed covers the entire water surface every year.

Top government officials had given an assurance many years ago that a permanent solution would be found to check the growth of hyacinth in the Mula Mutha river. Let alone a permanent solution, these officers have not been able to convene a joint meeting of the Khadki Cantonment Board, Pune Municipal Corporation and the defence authorities to even chalk out a plan.

Last year, the entire Sangamwadi village used to be evacuated every night due to mosquito menace since the entire river water surface was covered with hyacinth providing breeding ground for mosquitoes.

The residents of Sangamwadi have already complained to the civic authorities, but no cognisance has been taken as yet. The only person who benefits from the growth of the hyacinth is the contractor who is given lakhs worth of contract for clearing the hyacinth every year. This might be a reason why a permanent solution for the hyacinth menace is being avoided.