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## PMC in a fix over proposed BDPs

Radheshyam Jadhav, TNN 1 September 2009, 01:23am IST

PUNE: The Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) is in a tight spot over the proposed Bio-Diversity Park (BDP). Though the civic body has not reached any formula to raise funds for acquire the BDP land, the state government has told the civic body to take care of the BDPs on its own. Environmentalists, on the other hand, want the PMC to protect the open lands from encroachers.

Following the Green Pune Movement's (GPM) demand to act against encroachers in the areas proposed as BDPs, the PMC is carrying out extensive drives against illegal constructions. However, the PMC admits that these are temporary measures as the PMC has no permanent mechanism to curb encroachments.

"It is the responsibility of the corporation to protect the proposed BDPs and present the outlay to acquire the BDP," said T C Benjamin, state urban development department principal secretary.

The civic administration has suggested that to expedite the process of approval of the draft Development Plan (DP) for the 23 merged villages, the PMC General Body (GB) could approve

a resolution asking the state government to approve the DP keeping the decision on Bio-Diversity Park (BDP) in abeyance.

The draft Development Plan (DP) for the 23 merged villages recommends reservation of 1,600 hectares of land for the BDP. The PMC will have to acquire 978 hectares held by individuals. In 2005, when the PMC approved the DP, the estimated cost for land acquisition was pegged at Rs 500 crore, which has now risen to Rs 905 crore. According to the civic body, while Rs 655 crore will be required for purchasing the land, another Rs 250 crore will be needed for primary protection of the acquired land from slums and other encroachments. The civic body, however, has no plan in place for raising the funds needed.

Corporators from the fringe villages that were merged in the PMC limits, raised the issue of the plan's pendency in the recent GB meeting. "For nearly 12 years the DP has been pending, and now with the assembly elections approaching the development of the villages will be delayed further," the corporators said.

"The DP is stuck in red-tapism and it is obvious that slums will come up on the hill top and hill slope areas. The BDP is impractical and the PMC will never be able to acquire and protect the hill top and hill slopes. Instead with the limited constructions owners of the hilltop and hill slope should be shouldered to protect greenery," says BJP corporator Ujwal Keskar who adds that in next few years thousands of slums will come up in the proposed BDP areas.

GPM activist and former mayor Vandana Chavan contradicts Keskar's argument. "There is a need for strong will to protect the city's environment. The PMC should start thinking of the resources to acquire proposed BDP. There is no point in saying that PMC has no mechanism to protect these areas from encroachment as the state has enabled the civic body to initiate action against its officers who fail to curb any kind of encroachments. And the civic administration needs to take tough stand on the issue."