

20-year plan for MMR may open floodgates to disasters

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MUMBAI: In July, the metropolitan areas of Thane, Kalyan, Ambernath, and Ulhasnagar were inundated after incessant heavy rainfall.

Exactly a year ago, the twin satellite towns of Vasai-Virar had been flooded, leading to no road or rail connectivity for days.

As experts majorly blame unchecked construction and inept flood-mitigation measures for the massive flooding, the state government's 20-year plan for the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) is a major cause of worry as it looks at further urbanisation, even in green zones.

All of MMR, which is seven times the area of Mumbai, has already seen reckless construction in the past two to three decades. The draft Mumbai Metropolitan Regional Plan (2016-36) has opened up 2,918 sq km for



■ **Poor flood-mitigation measures – like lack of stormwater drainage – led to a Kolhapur-bound train being stranded in flooded tracks near Ulhas river at Badlapur last month. Passengers had to be rescued using boats and a helicopter.**

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development, an analysis by the Urban Design Research Institute (UDRI), a city-based group of planners, shows.

According to the plan, the metropolitan region's total area is 4,311.75 sq km. If it opens up 2,918 sq km for development,

nearly 70% of MMR could effectively be built upon.

The UDRI has arrived at this figure looking at the built-up area that the plan allows and permissible land uses in different zones.

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questioned the government over the detention of J&K politicians, asking why their freedom was being curbed. "Happy Independence Day! Salute the freedom fighters who braved a colonial power to win independence for the nation... Why is freedom being denied to three former CMs of J&K since August 6? Why are two former CMs under virtual solitary confinement and one former CM under house arrest? Why are political leaders who fought secessionists and militants locked up?" Chidambaram said in a tweet.

Former Northern Army commander Lieutenant General DS Hooda (retd) said the image that Modi projected while delivering his address was of a very decisive leader who is willing to move ahead on major reforms and break the deadlock on longstanding issues such as Article 370 and the appointment of CDS.

Modi's Independence Day speech was representative of a leader who has just been re-elected with a bigger mandate and someone who is quite reassured about the policies and politics he is pursuing, said author and journalist Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay.

"His speech is neatly divided into a report card of the five years of the NDA's first term and 10 weeks of his second term. There are segments on intent, policy and announcements like the CDS. And there's a segment that reflects his ideological orientation, the one where he refers to those with smaller families as patriots," Mukhopadhyay added.

20-year...

The regional plan permits more activities like residential, recreational, quarrying and building roads in the green zone than in the urbanisable zone. It allows 28 of the 31 permitted uses in green zone 1 and 25 of the 31 permitted uses in green zone 2. In the urbanisable zone, 25 of the 31 activities are permitted.

The regional plan itself states that the scale of development is alarming as "less than 20% of the built-up area had development permissions." Adding to this are the poor flood-mitigation measures in this region. According to urban experts, although Mumbai has a stormwater drain system to flush out rainwater, these areas largely depend on natural sources to soak water in. The consequence was visible last month, when a Kolhapur-bound Mahalaxmi Express was stranded in flooded tracks near Ulhas river and passengers had

to be rescued using boats and a helicopter.

Pankaj Joshi, executive director, UDRI said, "Although section 14A of the Mumbai Regional Town Planning Act (MRTP) mandates a flood-mitigation plan to be made, the regional plan has not specified any measures. Flooding in this region is not a one-time phenomenon anymore. It is a perennial problem that needs solutions."

The regional plan, which was released in 2016, is currently pending with the Maharashtra government for a final approval. According to a right-to-information (RTI) query of May 2019, only a part of the plan (the Matheran eco-sensitive zone) has been sanctioned by the government.

The plan is published once every 20 years to shape the urban-planning future of a region, which in the case of the MMR, encompasses a population of 22.8 million people, including the 12.4 million people living in Mumbai, 7 municipal corporations, 9 municipal councils, 35 census towns and 994 villages. While the corporations and councils have their individual development plan (DP), the regional plan becomes the overarching plan and its directives must filter through to the individual DPs.

Joshi also alleged that the regional plan is not in sync with the individual DPs of the municipal corporations.

However, RA Rajeev, metropolitan commissioner, MMRDA said, "Green zone does not mean that there cannot be any development in the area. These zones also permit industrial development. The chief minister has now set up a new committee to look into the causes of the flood and define the flood lines which is an important step."

The UDRI has made several recommendations, which include clearly defining the land-use zone and restructure the land uses to prevent urban sprawl and protect natural areas, prepare a framework for de-congestion and also look at strategies for education, health-care, water management and sanitation.

Pehlu...

Swami gave them "benefit of doubt" in the absence of adequate evidence.

Khan, a dairy farmer, was lynched on the Delhi-Jaipur highway near Behror in Rajasthan's Alwar district while he was transporting cattle from a market in