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PCMC proposes gardens, playgrounds along green belts of city's dying rivers

PUNE: The much polluted rivers, Pavana, Indrayani and Mula, seem to be staring at an even bleaker future. The municipal corporation of Pimpri Chinchwad has proposed over a dozen constructions, including an 18-metre wide road, on river bed areas marked as 'no development zones'. The municipal corporation has proposed modifications in development control rules, following which such constructions would be allowed.

The Pimpri Chinchwad Municipal Corporation has also invited suggestions and objections from citizens to the proposed modification, which will be considered by the municipal commissioner after which the proposal will be sent to the state government for final approval. The only caveat is that developers or individuals will have to comply with some development restrictions.

If it comes through, the proposed new rule would open river bed areas to private developers to set up gardens, playgrounds and also cremation and burial grounds, apart from sewage and water treatment plants. All these would be allowed in the blue floodline area. The proposal also suggests allowing temporary structures to come up between October and June every year.

Private developers can make an application to the municipal commissioner to take up these works, which can be carried out only after the irrigation department gives its consent.

The proposal adds that all development in blue floodline or green belt shall be permitted by the corporation only after it recovers a premium amount which would be equal to 25 % of the land rate as per the prevailing annual statement of rates of state government. This premium would be utilized for the river front development project.

Areas that come under blue floodlines (excluding gaathan/congested areas) are maintained as "no development zones". The proposal states that an elevated road of 18 metre width may be developed within the no development zone of blue floodline/green belt maintained along the river.

In June last year, the PCMC general body had passed a resolution to effect a modification to demarcate floodlines on the development plan (DP) of old limits. It had also proposed to include a new rule and allied provisions related to development in floodlines in the development control rules. Earlier this month, the municipal corporation invited suggestions and objections in writing from citizens until February 15. The suggestions have to be addressed to the municipal commissioner, said a public notice issued by the corporation.

In Pimpri Chinchwad, the main river is Pavana, which traverses a distance of over 12 km. In addition, there are two rivers - Indrayani and Mula, which are along the boundaries of the

municipal limits. Not only do the river's water quality fall in the 'D' category, which is not even fit for agricultural use, unauthorized constructions have also come up, particularly along Pavana.

Activists have been demanding for years that the rivers be saved and are only further worried with PCMC's proposal. Vikas Patil, member Pune district environment committee, said, "The river bed should be demarcated first. The red and blue floodlines should be physically marked. The river, its natural course, and biodiversity should not be disturbed by constructions. We are ready to accept development, but there should be no constructions which will affect the natural flow of river. Moreover, there are several other issues which pertain to river pollution. Several nullahs carrying industrial and domestic effluents have resulted in pollution."

Flooding of nearby residential areas is another concern. "We have recently urged the municipal corporation to take action against filling of the riverbed with debris as this will affect water flow and cause flooding in residential areas in the future. The red and blue floodlines should be marked. The natural nullahs should not be obstructed. We will submit our suggestions after we study the proposal," said Chandrakant Doke, environmental activist.