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### **Slum rehabilitation put on fast track**

The slum rehabilitation scheme, which has been chugging along from the past decade, has now been put on the fast track.

The Slum Rehabilitation Authority (SRA) has cleared 135 new proposals in the past eight months. These projects will provide at least 40,000 families with new homes.

This is a significant number considering the SRA had cleared hardly 50 proposals benefitting an average of 11,000 slum dwellers annually in the past 13 years.

SS Zende, chief executive officer, SRA, said relaxed norms helped speed up the proposals. "We are offering fast track permissions as well as facilitating the registration of land in the names of slum dwellers," said Zende. He said the improving real estate market had contributed to the spurt in slum revamp programmes. "This has helped quicken the process."

At least 1.2 lakh slum dwellers have been shifted to newly constructed houses in 13 years while another 1.5 lakh houses are currently being constructed across the city under the SRA.

The Shiv Sena-Bharatiya Janata Party introduced the SRA to ensure a slum-free Mumbai.

Under the scheme, slum dwellers — at least 70 per cent of them should be willing

— appoint builders to rehabilitate them in flats on that land. The builder, in return, gets permission to build additional flats, which he can sell in the open market to make money.

SRA projects have been mired in controversy right from the inception of the scheme. The main grievances were that the builders were coercing slum dwellers to give them development rights.

The scheme also attracted vested political interests.

The SRA's high-powered committee set up by the high court has cleared 800 complaints in the past 10 months. "Most were minor issues like a few residents not being satisfied with the builder appointed. We managed to convince them," said Zende.

Experts say that the slum rehabilitation programme needs a complete rethink. "Most of the projects have been stuck due to vested interests," said Pranab Datta, Vice Chairman and Managing Director, Knight Frank India Limited, a leading real estate consultancy firm.

"Since slum rehabilitation is a complex issue, which involves more than half of the city's population, there should be holistic planning."