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State-appointed panel to report illegal structures on fringes

PUNE: A three-member committee will survey illegal constructions on the fringes of Pune and other civic bodies and the state government will announce an action plan once the committee submits its report by August 15.

MLAs representing the city and the district had raised the issue of rampant illegal constructions in the fringes bordering the city, recently. Speaker Dilip Walse Patil had asked the state government to form a committee. Accordingly, the state government on Wednesday announced a panel comprising principal secretaries of the urban development, revenue and rural development departments.

Shirur MLA Ashok Pawar, who had started a debate in the

state assembly earlier this week, said, "The state government has promised concrete solutions to curb illegal constructions in the villages surrounding Pune city. Along with Pune, the committee will conduct a detailed survey of illegal constructions in the gram panchayat areas surrounding Nashik, Thane, Aurangabad and Nagpur municipal corporations."

Revenue minister Balasaheb Thorat had admitted that illegal constructions around cities like Pune are a threat to planned development as these areas are slated for merger with the civic limits. Following Wednesday's meeting, district collector Vikas Deshmukh, who was also present, stated that the district administration would cooperate with the state committee, which is likely to visit the city next week.

"The city's population of about 33 lakh and Pimpri Chinchwad's 17 lakh, has increased the need for housing. It is high time that city has an integrated development plan, which will check the growth of slums and illegal constructions in the areas surrounding the city. The district collector must strictly implement the Development Control (DC) rules in a 10-km radius of Pune and Pimpri-Chinchwad municipal corporations to stem the chaos," former state urban planner Ramchandra Gohad told TOI.

The scramble for affordable homes has led to rampant illegal constructions in the villages bordering the city where building plans are sanctioned by the gram panchayat. Town planners said that there is blatant violation of the 0.4 Floor Space Index (FSI) in the fringe and merged villages. In many cases, the panchayats have sanctioned an FSI of 8. Such violations were found in a 20 to 25-km radius from the PMC limits.

The state governments move to appoint a committee comes against the backdrop of deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar directing the town planning department to revise the regional plan (RP) for the Pune Metropolitan Region (PMR), by next year.

Pawar recently said that the state was concerned about the haphazard growth in Pune region in the past decade. The existing regional plan was drafted in 1990. However, the ground situation has changed drastically. It is not able to cope with the rapid pace of changes in the region. Hence, the town planning department should start collecting inclusive data and prepare a new regional plan, Pawar directed.

Town planners and experts insist that any changes in the regional plan and its effective implementation would depend

on PMRDA, which must go functional first so that the regional plan can be implemented. Pawar did not say a word about the PMRDA going operational. The PMR, spread over 1,340 sq km in Haveli taluka, was defined in 1967 and comprises Pune, Pimpri-Chinchwad, the three cantonments of Pune, Khadki and Dehu Road, and close to 100 other census towns and villages.

Unhappy politicians from the city and urban planners have questioned the committee's motive and sought the immediate functioning of the [Pune Metropolitan Development Authority](#) (PMRDA) to curb illegal constructions and pave the way for integrated development of the region.

BJP city unit chief and corporator Vikas Mathkari said, "Announcing a committee will not curb the illegal constructions. The state government is already aware of the number of illegal constructions. The state needs to act against them. The proposal for the merger of surrounding villages is pending with the PMC's city improvement committee and meanwhile massive construction is coming up in these villages. It would be difficult for the civic body to provide basic infrastructure to people in these villages when they merge with the city limits."

Congress corporator Aba Bagul said that the only solution to curb illegal constructions in the fringes is to functionalise PMRDA. "The district collector and the civic body have their limitations in carrying out anti encroachment drives in the surrounding villages. Once PMRDA is in place, this issue could be resolved," he added.

In April, chief minister Prithviraj Chavan had said a final decision on PMRDA would be taken within three months on the basis of recommendations of a study group. According to government officials, one of the reasons for delay is the difference between the Congress and the [Nationalist Congress Party \(NCP\)](#) over the leadership of PMRDA.

While the Congress camp wants Chavan, who heads the MMRDA, to hold the chairmanship of PMRDA, the NCP camp is pushing Pawar's name for the post.

Times View

The indiscriminate construction activity on the fringes of Pune

and other cities should be checked before it gets out-of-hand. Once the state government-appointed panel submits its report on illegal constructions on the outskirts of growing cities, there must be some active deterrent. Planned development will be near-impossible if the merger process of 25 villages with the [Pune Municipal Corporation](#)

is delayed any further. Till then, the collectorate must be given adequate manpower, police protection and the machinery to act against illegal structures.