

# 'Decentralization is the key'

**Pune Municipal Commissioner Pravinsinh Pardeshi** shares his vision for Pune's growth, the various initiatives launched during his tenure and how citizens gain when officers are empowered at ward level, with *Vijay Pandya*

Pune is a very vibrant city, known for its excellence in IT, automobiles and education. Like all cities, it had begun to witness a mismatch between investment and growth. During the real estate boom, a large number of high-end flats and apartments were developed. This led to a severe deficiency in the availability of public infrastructure ranging from public transport to sewerage.

To resolve this, we first did a city development plan in consultation with stakeholders and citizen's associations.

We negotiated with the army and got land; this enabled us to provide additional 110 kilometres of new, wider roads for Bus Rapid Transport System (BRTS). In these new roads all utilities, sewage lines have been shifted to the side, they have footpaths and cycle tracks...

We found that the planning function of the PMC, delivery and management as well as day-to-day running, were all clubbed together with the same officers. Operating in a reacting mode made day-to-day operations overtake planning. The same officers were caught up in dealing with incidents like pipe leakages and fires breaking out, so they had no time to plan for mega projects.

I sensed that there was a need to decentralise and empower the officers at the ward level itself. Accordingly, all 14 Ward Officers, Ward Committees and Zonal Commissioners were given the powers to clear works up to Rs. 25 lakh. The headquarters staff was sent to the 14 wards. This ensured that civic services could be maintained in an orderly way by them. They were provided with Blackberrys and laptops.

Bi-monthly meetings were held with citizens, which nobody would avoid. This ensured that service delivery and accountability to citizens is there. They had to record action points and compliance.

This year the Rs. 250 crore PMC budget was allocated to the 14 ward officers. They consulted internally and decided how it should be used. Decentralisation helps in taking decisions faster at a local level and this arrangement is also more



Every Tuesday the PMC celebrates 'No Vehicle Day'. PMCCommissioner Pravinsinh Pardeshi himself cycles to work every Tuesday setting an example, which has inspired other Pune-kars to cycle to work.

convenient for citizens. This also helps in better planning and rapid implementation of development works.

We are also taking steps to make Pune a more environment-friendly city. Pune city generates 1000 metric tonnes of solid waste, which was earlier all being dumped at one place without treatment. Now we have started the process of converting solid waste into RDF, increased the number of solid waste dumping locations and started converting it into biogas, in the process reducing the carbon footprint and making the city greener.

We are also involving rag pickers and supporting them. We help them to go from house to house, segregate waste and sell plastic... we have set

up PMC centres at various locations for this purpose so that they are not exploited.

Pune generates 700 MLD of waste water per day. We were previously only treating 300 MLD out of that. Cosmetic changes like planting greenery along the river bank are not the solution to this problem. In the last one and half years I have added 100 MLD of the treated water. Pune will be the first city to treat all its waste.

Initiatives are also being taken to increase the greenery of Pune city. We have identified and converted 500 hectares of land into a biodiversity park. This has not only increased the green cover but also saved the hills from erosion.

We are also offering incentives to citizens if they make an effort in helping to make Pune cleaner and greener. We have a unique policy under which we provide 50% tax rebate to buildings that use solar energy. We also give tax rebates to those households, which segregate their waste and process the organic waste on their own to reduce the burden on the PMC's resources.

There are interactive forums like the Mohalla Committees and Pune Citizens Environment Fund, they work together to prepare an environment status report, identify problems in each area and suggest actions to be taken to solve them.

PMC has also formed a Non-motorized Transport cell. People who walk to work, cycle are involved, they help keep footpaths free of encroachments.

All ward officers have to take Mohalla Samiti meetings every month. All officers are email-friendly so interaction with citizens and solving their problems is much faster.

We hope citizens can trust the Pune Municipal Corporation. If things don't happen, they should know why so that they too can be part of the solution. For instance, previously people would be frustrated, complaining, filing PILs, causing obstruction because the PMC was not doing what they thought was right. Now they are part of the solution, that's the key.