

Consider these three complaints about Mumbai. The city is “ill-built, ill-drained, or rather not drained at all, very dirty and very unhealthy”. In many parts of Mumbai, “there are no proper roads, only narrow tortuous lanes and passages and horrible gullies”. The metropolis “is fast becoming an open nallah. Clearly, this is because there is no central agency to monitor multiple works going on simultaneously.”

As it turns out, only the last observation, made by a science teacher to the reporters of an afternoon newspaper, relates to June 31 floods. The first grouse was expressed in the biography of Bartle Frere, who was governor of Bombay Presidency for five years from 1862. The second remark was made in 1905 by an administrator named GOW Dunn, the head of the City Improvement Trust. Since our politicians and bureaucrats have, at the behest of the powerful construction industry, ensured the subversion of any attempt at coherent urban planning, there’s little doubt that we’ll be airing similar views about our living conditions when 2020 rolls around.

ARTICLE IN HINDUSTAN TIMES

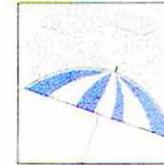
Naresh Fernandes

The roots of the city’s present crisis lie in the desire of our rulers to make a complete break with our past. Faced with infrastructural problems that seemed just as gargantuan as the ones we now face, Frere and the City Improvement Trust framed ambitious plans to build public works that, in the literal sense of the term, took into account the common good. The manner in which they went about accomplishing their tasks only highlights how the city’s contemporary political and business elite have chosen expediency over integrity.

When Frere left India on March 6, 1867, more than one million pounds had been spent on public works in Bombay, while projects in progress cost another 1.5 million pounds. Among the buildings he commissioned are the imposing Gothic structures we now know as the sessions court, the university and the

Will your area be flooded this monsoon? Check now

Naresh Kamath
Mumbai, April 9



READYING FOR RAINS

WITH JUST two months for the monsoon to begin, the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) is still tackling teething problems in widening problematic drains in the city.

Encroachments and utilities, like telecom, gas, water and cable lines, are hampering the civic body’s floodwater evacuation drainage programme that was initiated for the suburbs. According to MMRDA officials, of the 47 flood-prone areas identified by them, 21 areas — with 99 trouble spots between them — may remain unrepaired before the rains due to objections from shops and utility companies.

In a meeting held with Mayor Shubha Raul on Monday, the officials said only 26 would be tackled before the rains.

“The commercial encroachments are proving to be a problem as they want alternative spaces nearby,” said Raul. “I have ordered MMRDA officials to solve the matter on a war footing.”

Of 430 spots identified in 47 areas, the programme will not be implemented in 99 spots due to “lack of cooperation” from various utility firms.

“The 16 utility firms in the city have objected, saying it would be difficult for them to shift the lines,” said Sunil Prabhu, Leader of the civic House.

MMRDA was largely blamed for the 26/7 floods that reduced the size of the large drains, slowing rainwater disposal.

A committee of civic and MMRDA officials will now undertake a joint inspection and give updates on the progress of the work.



The roadblocks

47 areas have been identified as flood-prone, of which the MMRDA has said only 26 will be rectified. Pumps will be installed here, to drain out water. Kalanagar gets flooded due to overflow from the Mithi river, the MMRDA said, while in other areas most drains cannot be cleared due to encroachments

In most flood-prone areas, like at the Railway Colony in Khar and parts of Kurla, nullahs have been widened and work is almost complete. The cross-drainage system has been installed in about 25 areas and is expected to facilitate removal of excess rainwater

Source: Hindustan Times

WHAT'S LEFT

- Mangrove cover in Mumbai: **3000 acres**
- Areas with mangroves: Vikhroli, Bhandup, Mulund, behind Lokhandwala Complex, Andheri, Malad Creek, Versova, behind I C Colony, Mahul
- Salt-pan land in Mumbai: **4500 acres**
- Areas: Mulund, Bhandup, Kanjurmarg, Vikhroli, Ghatkopar, Chembur, Wadala

WHAT WE HAVE LOST

- **2000 acres** of mangroves has been lost, mainly along the Malad Creek, Versova and behind World Trade Centre in Cuffe Parade, between 1998 and 2003; **200 acres** of salt-pan land was lost in 1950s when Garodia Nagar (Ghatkopar) and Chheda Nagar (Chembur) came up.

THE IMPACT

- Mumbai felt the full effect of destruction of mangroves on 26 July 2005; the reclamation of the Mahim Creek and the destruction of mangroves in the Bandra-Kurla Complex were the main reasons for the massive flooding that day.
- The destruction of salt-pan plots will lead to even more flooding because these plots accommodate a lot of excess water during heavy rain.

MILLS & BOOM

- The total area of defunct mills in central Mumbai is around **600 acres**.
- Citizens lost about **200 acres** of open space following a Supreme Court order that let mill owners retain most of this area for themselves.

NO BREATHING SPACE

Mumbai compares abysmally with other cities

- Ratio of open space to total population: **.03 acres/1,000 people**
- Ratio of open space to population in London: **12 acres/1,000 people**
- Ratio of open space to population in New York: **4 acres/1,000 people**
- Ratio of open space to population in Singapore: **6 acres/1,000 people**

high court, which stand opposite the Oval. These buildings were laid out, amidst wide roads, on land that had been freed by demolishing the walls of the old Bombay Fort. The projects were funded by money generated from the sale of the newly generated real estate.

But the most remarkable of Frere's achievements was to persuade Mumbai's commercial elite, who had profited immensely from the cotton boom, that accompanied the American civil war, to contribute generously to shaping the emerging metropolis. "By exercising his personal influence, Bartle Frere induced wealthy merchants of Bombay to make munificent donations for these works," writes Rekha Ranade in her study of Frere's tenure in Mumbai. Among the traders who responded to his requests were Premchand Roychand, who made a donation to the university library, Jamsetji Jejeebhoy, who endowed a school of the arts, and Cowasji Jehangir, who offered Rs one lakh for the university in addition to building 40 water drinking fountains. Adds the Bombay Gazetteer, "Private individuals and public firms [worked]...with one fixed idea of improving and enlarging the city to which their several destinies had driven them."

It's startling to note just how little Mumbai's business "leaders" are involved in funding city projects today. Fifteen of the 36 Indian billionaires on the Forbes rich list live in Mumbai, but when's the last time you heard of one of them offering to donate a flyover to the city, the way Lady Avabai Jamshetjee did in 1841 when the government wanted to build a causeway between Mahim and Bandra?

In fact, as is evident from the bitter legal battle they waged, against the state government's decision to reserve for public use some portion of the mill lands in central Mumbai, the city's economic elite are actively hampering the development of the metropolis, trading the

public good for short-term profit. (At least two of the 15 billionaires on the list have a direct involvement in the construction industry.)

That's something they wouldn't have been allowed to do under the terms of the City Improvement Trust, which was formed by the Bombay government in November 1898, shortly after a plague epidemic forced 850,000 people to flee the city between October 1896 and February 1897 and left an estimated 1,900 people dead each week. (The widely welcomed Supreme Court decision allowing mill owners to develop their land, without any thought for infrastructure and public utilities, came within a year of the flood on July 26, 2005, that left 452 Mumbaikars dead.)

Shaken by the tremendous loss of life caused by the plague and the economic effect it had on the city, the Trust was given with the task, among other things, of making new streets, opening out crowded localities and building sanitary dwellings for the poor. To this end, the Trust by 1908-'09 had acquired 1,460,000 square yards of land, having set up a special collector's court and a tribunal of appeal to hear disputes about compensation.

The Trust restructured the entire congested neighbourhood of Nagpada, which had a population of 11,000, offering them temporary rehousing while their new homes were being built. Similar schemes were implemented in Mandvi and Agripada. In addition, housing was created for mill workers in various complexes across the island city that are still called BIT chawls. Three new avenues – Princess Street, Sandhurst Road and Mohammedali Road – were also constructed.

The Trust is worth recalling, because it focused its attentions on improving the lives of the city's poorest, a priority, that has been abandoned both by the current civic administration and by the city's elite. Instead, such civic infrastructure as

flyovers is being built expressly for the affluent, squandering resources that could have been used on mass transit systems and other necessities that would benefit the majority of Mumbai residents. That's turning Mumbai into a schizophrenic city. The public philanthropy displayed during Frere's regime and the Trust's concern for the most marginal Mumbaikars are among the factors that gave our city its reputation for being cosmopolitan, welcoming metropolis, a place that was the hothouse of India's dreams.

In the opening chapter of his seminal book, *The City in History*, the American urban theorist Lewis Mumford noted, "Without a long running start in history, we shall not have the momentum needed, in our own consciousness, to take a sufficiently bold leap into the future." With the energy our rulers are now expending on obliterating the collective memory of our proud, inclusive past, it seems certain that our leap towards 2020 will end with a splash in another pool of floodwater.