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Mumbai's first mangrove rejuvenation project to begin soon

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MUMBAI: In probably the first such move to reclaim mangrove belts, the green lungs of the city, that have been lost to heavy debris dumping over the last three decades, the Mangrove Foundation, the Mahapreit, a state-owned renewable energy company, and Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) will jointly conduct an experimental project to reestablish lost mangrove zone in P north ward (Malad, malvani).

This belt, say officials, has vanished after it remained buried for decades under the debris dumped by encroachers in the late nineties.

"A thorough survey of debris dumps is being conducted across the city's mangrove belts with the help of an ERAF NGO. The initial three rounds of preliminary surveys have suggested that 98% of the dump cannot be recycled. Remaining such 13 debris dumps in the mangroves across the city's shores will also be inspected by the NGOs. This will help the Mahapreit and the state agencies to know as to exactly how much of mangrove area is affected and can be reestablished," said Virendra Tiwari, additional principal chief conservator of forest, Mangrove Cell.

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According to Tiwari the agreements with Mahapreit (Mahatma Phule Renewable Energy and Infrastructure Technology Ltd) and an NGO were signed early this year. After identifying the types of debris at these locations and strategies to remove them and reclaim the original land, the experimental project will begin in Malad and upon its results, remaining 13 dumps will be brought under the project in a phased manner, he added.

At the recently held meeting to discuss the pilot project, Ajit Kumar Jain Director ERAF referred to the urgency to conserve mangroves in light of the recent climatic changes observed all over the country and the abnormally high sea water level rise, as pointed out in the recently released World Meteorological Organization report. In the same meeting Bipin Shrimali CMD MAHAPREIT, announced that similar projects would be taken up in Ratnagiri and Palghar districts.



The issue of removing debris from mangroves was pending in the high court since 2005. The forest department was

instrumental in repeatedly taking up the need for rejuvenating these dying mangrove belts due to illegal dumping. The court had subsequently directed BMC to remove the debris but the local body administration was apprehensive about the amount of expenses needed to be spent on the huge men and machinery to be deployed for the removal. However, as per the 2018 order of the court, the responsibility of removal of debris has been fixed on BMC. In the earlier order in 2006 too, the court had fixed the same on the civic body.

As part of the project, it has been proposed to build make-shift chowkies in these zones for those who will keep vigil on the mangrove areas. The forest department officials and their vigilance staff will work from these chowkies to offer security to these belts. They will also have powers to take immediate penal actions against those involved in illegal dumping. A special effort will be taken to replant the mangroves. Very soon a meeting at the suburban collector's office is expected to give an approval for such chowkies first of which will be built at the Aksa beach near Malad, said sources.