

Now, RFD to 'impress' G20 delegates

City experts hope dignitaries would point out the fallacy to the civic body that so-called 'riverfront development' is being carried out within river banks and not on riverfront, which is outside the banks

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The controversial Riverfront Development (RFD) project is in the limelight again. The Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) recently completed a 300-metre first sample stretch of the project at Bund Garden ahead of the arrival of G20 delegates in the city.

The civic body wants to impress upon them the development strides the city is taking. However, critics argued that the development showcases a disregard for the environment while trying to impress the visiting dignitaries.

During the first round of the G20 Summit earlier this year, the PMC missed the chance to showcase the sample stretch between Chima Garden and Bund Garden, which was intended to demonstrate the city's progress. However, in preparation for the upcoming second round in June, the PMC has shifted its focus to completing the Ahilyabai Holkar Ghat near Yerwada bridge.

Surendra Karpe, deputy engineer, river rejuvenation department, PMC,

PHOTOS: MAHENDRA KOLHE



The stretch has been completed at Ahilyabai Holkar Ghat, featuring pavements and beautification

told Mirror that the 300-metre has been completed at the Ahilyabai Holkar Ghat, featuring pavements, ghats and beautification initiatives. A total of 24 ghats have been constructed, 6-metre tracks have been prepared and staircases have been built.

The RFD project, which began in December 2022, involved beautification of the riverbank from Sangamwadi to Bund Garden, construction of cycling tracks along the river and enhancing Naik Bet, an island in the river. The embankment and rock pitching work at Koregaon

Park, the Dhobi Ghat and Boat Club Road riverside have been completed by the contractors. The subsequent phases will focus on constructing footpaths and planting trees.

However, the project has faced lots of criticism due to its potential environmental impact. Initially, the PMC proposed the removal of over 6,000 trees along the Mula and Mutha rivers. Public opposition led to a public hearing, after which the final decision was entrusted with the state government. Concerned citizens argued that the project should

prioritise the riverfront itself, outside the natural river banks, in order to protect the riparian habitat and preserve the river's integrity.

Anita Benninger, an urban planning development and environment expert, expressed her concerns, and said, "The RFD or River Front Development is not taking place on the River Front but inside the river between its two natural banks. It is very important to demarcate the domain of the river and that of the riverfront. The area or domain of the river which is a natural water body is



divided from the riverfront to its natural river bank. The riverfront is outside the natural river bank. The river must be protected by holding the natural river banks sacrosanct. The riverfront development must take place beyond the natural river banks."

Benninger emphasized the need to prioritise the protection and rejuvenation of the natural water body and its banks, which support vital riparian habitats. "I hope the G 20 delegates would be wise enough to point out this fallacy and ask that the RFD as it stands now be modified to ensure the protection and rejuvenation of the natural water body and its banks which house the critical riparian habitat and the RFD takes place in the correct location, which is outside the natural banks of the river," she added.