MUMBAI / BMC

Mumbai Does Not Need More Civic Spectacle. It Needs a BMC That Can Be Measured.

Three episodes in three weeks show a corporation that announces, reverses and fines. What is missing is a way for anyone to check how it is doing.

ADITYA TOTADE · MUMBAI · 11 OCTOBER 2026

Ask a Mumbaikar about the BMC and you will usually hear a party's name. Ask what the corporation has actually done about the dust, the garbage or the encroachment outside their building, and the answer gets thinner. That gap, between who controls the BMC and what it delivers, is what I want to look at, because the last few weeks have shown it more clearly than any manifesto could.

Start with construction debris. From Monday 12 October, the BMC will fine ₹25,000 per instance on any vehicle carrying debris without an active tracking system, and on any construction site not registered on its debris portal, according to a circular sent to the wards. The timing is easy to understand: the air is getting worse as the monsoon withdraws.

But the fine is not the number that interests me. Mumbai generates roughly 8,000 tonnes of construction and demolition waste a day. Its processing plants handle about 1,200. Five years ago the city is reported to have generated only 1,200 to 1,300 tonnes a day, so today's capacity looks sized for the Mumbai of 2021, before the Metro works, the road concretisation and the redevelopment boom. That is my reading; the BMC has not put it that way. To its credit, it has invited private firms to add 2,000 tonnes a day. Even if all of it gets built, capacity reaches about 3,200 tonnes, which is 40 per cent of today's volume. A fine cannot close that distance.

Then there is the portal. Between 24 August and 9 October it received 220 registrations, 109 of them from builders and developers, according to BMC data. I cannot tell you whether that is good or bad, because no one has published how many active sites the BMC expects to see. The corporation has said the portal will be linked to its building-permission system and will estimate the debris each project should produce. If that is right, the denominator exists. A tracking system without a denominator is not yet a measurement.

The second episode is messier. On 19 September the BMC announced a three-month drive, starting 1 October, against 39,111 slum structures 14 feet or taller, about 18 per cent of the 2,23,150 slum structures Mumbai has. It followed two fatal incidents, the Kurla

landslide and the Mankhurd house collapse. That is a serious reason to act. Unsafe structures kill people, and a municipal body that looks away is failing at its most basic job.

Then came the objections. Corporators from the BJP, Congress and Shiv Sena (UBT) said they had not been consulted. The Sena (UBT)'s Yashodhar Phanse asked on what basis structures were being shortlisted. The BJP's leader of the House, Ganesh Khankar, wrote to Commissioner Ashwini Bhide asking for a rollback and noting that nearly 40 per cent of Mumbai lives in slum pockets. On 1 October, the day the drive was meant to begin, Bhide said, "No mass action or special drive is planned," and that ward teams would keep up routine action with a focus on unsafe multi-storey structures. The joint commissioner who was to oversee the drive told Hindustan Times, "There was no special drive announced," even though the BMC's own press note of 19 September said otherwise. Opponents of the drive said that day they had nothing in writing.

I do not read this as a story with one villain. Corporators are right that a drive touching tens of thousands of homes should not reach them through a press note, and the questions they asked, why 14 feet, which structures, in what order, deserve public answers. The new line, routine action against what is genuinely unsafe, may well be the sounder policy. But a safety drive that is announced, opposed and disowned within two weeks says something unflattering about the administration too. The risk that prompted it did not change; the plan did, and I have not seen an explanation of why. An appointed commissioner and elected corporators answer to different people. What is missing is a set of facts they both have to answer to.

The Bombay High Court made a version of this point on 7 October. Hearing petitions about dumping at Kanjurmarg, the bench said clean roads in South Mumbai and Worli do not make Mumbai clean, singled out Jogeshwari and Malad, and asked the BMC for an affidavit on what ward officers have done to assess the ground reality. When a court has to ask for that, the missing information is a political problem, not just a technical one.

So what would "measurable" mean? Not a prettier dashboard. A bad system does not become accountable because it has an app. It would be something duller and more specific. For every major programme: what was promised, by when, how much has been spent, what is finished, what has failed, and who is responsible. For debris, three weekly numbers: tonnes estimated, tonnes tracked, tonnes processed. For demolitions, published criteria before the first notice goes out. For garbage, ward-level data the High Court does not have to ask for.

Mumbai's civic politics does not lack passion. It lacks a shared scoreboard. Until the BMC publishes one, and the commissioner and corporators agree to be judged on it, we will keep arguing about who is in charge. I would rather we start with one number and argue from there.