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MANGROVE MAKEOVERS COULD SAVE GREENERY

Developing leisure zones along mangroves & creeks may protect these ecosystems from abuse and increase open spaces

Sukhada Tatke | TNN

Mumbai is an urban jungle blessed with close to 71 sq km of creeks and mangroves along its coastline, but the beneficiaries of this bounty – mainly us — have done woefully little to protect as well as beautify these fragile, yet important ecosystems. On the contrary, these green zones, which are natural barriers against tides, storms and erosion, have suffered a long history of abuse and encroachment.

Protecting areas around the fast-diminishing and increasingly polluted creeks and mangroves could therefore go a long way towards preserving them. It would also unlock their natural beauty and, in the process, enhance the environs and space for leisure.

The Open Mumbai exhibition, currently on at the NGMA, has proposed that the abuse and neglect can be arrested by developing public spaces around creeks and mangroves. The proposal envisages 0.2 sq km of boardwalks lining portions of the approximately 61.7 sq km of mangroves in the city. Beautification has also been proposed along creeks, with 0.14 sq km of walkways, gardens and so on envisaged at three locations, Malad and near Mankhurd and Mulund (East).

“This plan envisages a much-needed barrier or buffer zone between these wetlands and the city,” says architect P K Das, one of the organizers of the Open Mumbai exhibition. “Not only would these areas be visited by people, but the creeks and mangroves would also be open to public vigilance. Importantly, it would help expand and network our open spaces in this city. It might also help reduce environmental damage.”

The idea of creating public open spaces around creeks and mangroves is not new. It has been implemented the world over and even closer to home. Take, for instance, Chennai and its plan to rejuvenate one of its oldest ecosystems — Adyar Creek. The eco-restoration plan has even identified pollution-control measures, such as treating and diverting municipal and industrial wastewater. It also recommends sanitation facilities and organized solid waste management systems.

Open Mumbai’s proposal for Mumbai includes nearshore protection measures, development of prominent open spaces into interactive areas for people and development of selected measures for controlled access to estuaries. “Increased interaction between people would help safeguard the banks of estuaries and develop public awareness towards eco-restoration efforts and the ecosystems of estuaries and creeks,” said Das.

The plan hopes to capitalize on the reality that Mumbai is amongst the few cities in the world where vast stretches of creeks and mangroves intermingle with the city’s land mass. “Both creeks and mangroves are part of a unified ecological system that must be protected, nur-Boardwalk

tured and integrated,” said Das.

Open Mumbai has proposed that the city’s new Development Plan should have provisions for creeks and mangroves. These include defining their boundaries and reserving 30 metres along the sides of these wetlands as compulsory public spaces. Construction would be limited to public conveniences, like toilets, water fountains and security booths. Landscape development would comprise paving, walkways, boardwalks and so on.

Sharad Chaphekar, honorary director for environmental conservation at the Indian Institute of Environmental Medicine, said, “The basic problem for Mumbai’s coastal areas is that they are not protected because of dumping and reclamation. If that is stopped and the mangrove habitat is protected, the mangroves would be safe and grow properly.’

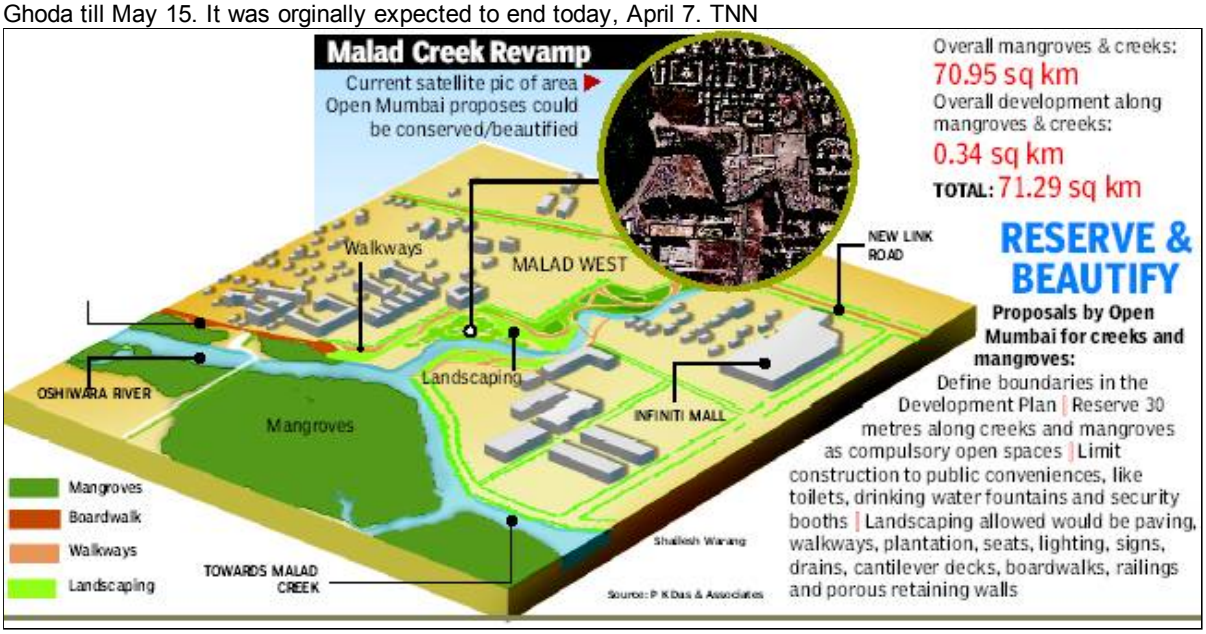
He added that while any effort to conserve mangroves is laudable, he could not comment on any proposal without knowing about it.

Praveen Pardeshi, forest secretary, said, “We have started notifying mangroves on government land. Once they are demarcated, we will put up boards about the value of mangroves. We have also formed a special protection cell for mangroves under the chairmanship of the chief conservator of forests. This will ensure stronger vigilance and protection of mangroves.”

Exhibit extended

The Open Mumbai exhibition, which explores ways to expand and link public areas in the city, will continue at the NGMA in Kala

Ghoda till May 15. It was orginally expected to end today, April 7. TNN

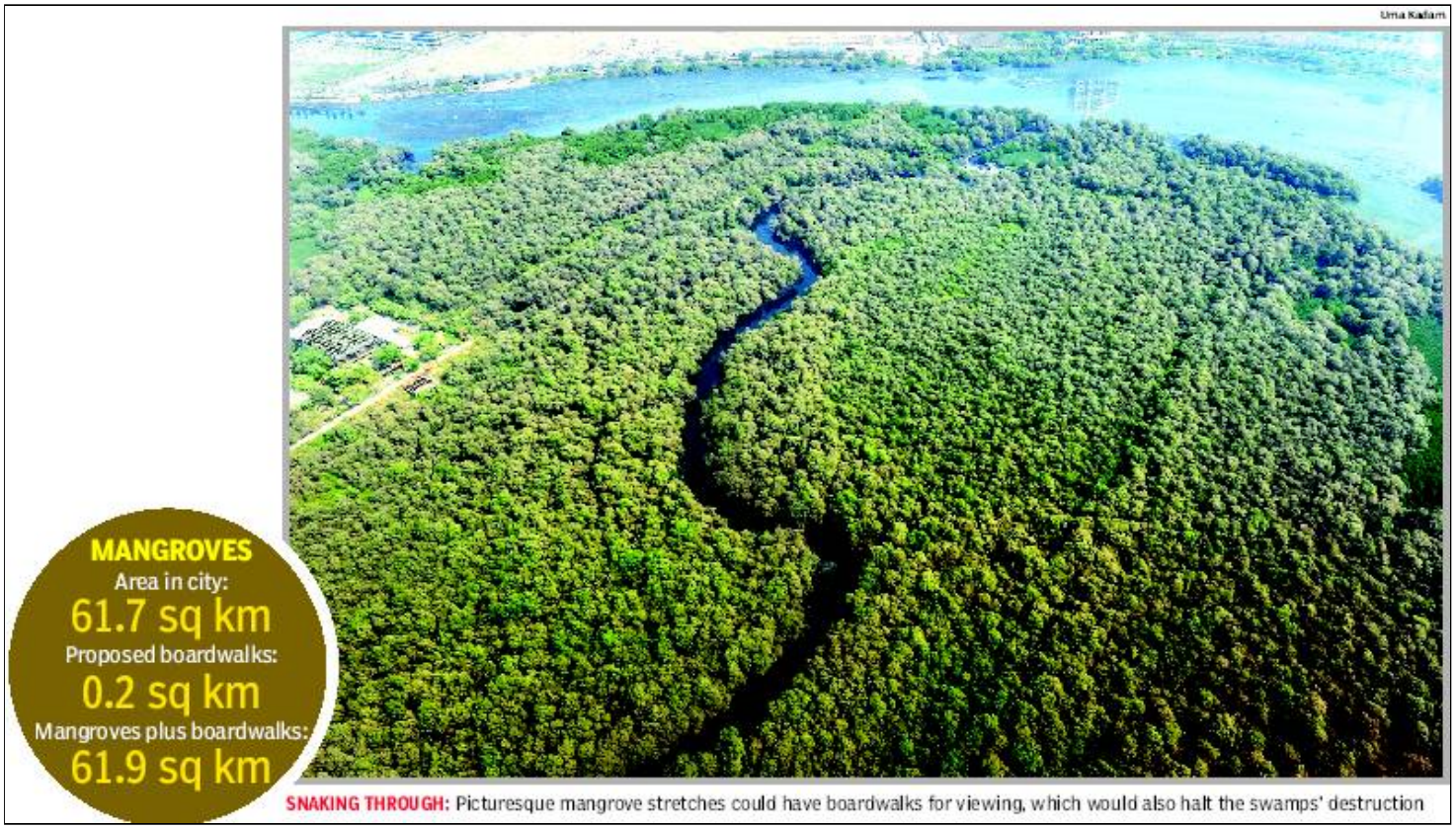


Malad Creek Revamp Current satellite pic of area Open Mumbai proposes could be conserved/beautified

CREEKS	Area	Proposed devpt	Total
	(sq m)	(sq m)	(sq m)
Malad (Versova) Creek	30 L	0.7 L	30.7
Creek near Mankhurd	10.1 L	0.2 L	10.3 L
Creek near Mulund East	1.1 L	0.5 L	1.6 L
Total	41.2 L	1.4 L	42.6 L
	4.12 sq km	0.14 sq km	4.26 sq km

Other creeks: (Sewri, Manori and near Ghatkopar, Vikhroli & Mulund): 5.13 sq km

Overall creeks: 9.25 sq km



SNAKING THROUGH: Picturesque mangrove stretches could have boardwalks for viewing, which would also halt the swamps' destruction