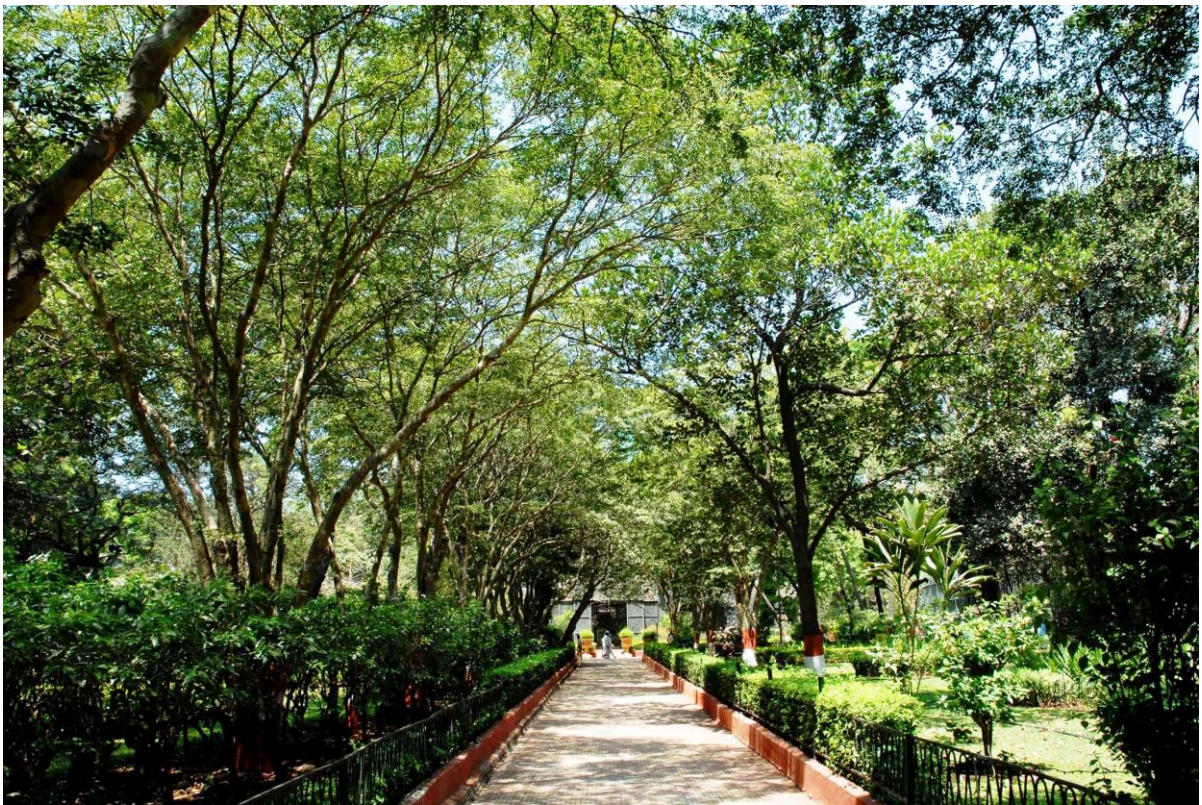


V.J.B. Udyan Zoo

Rani Bagh

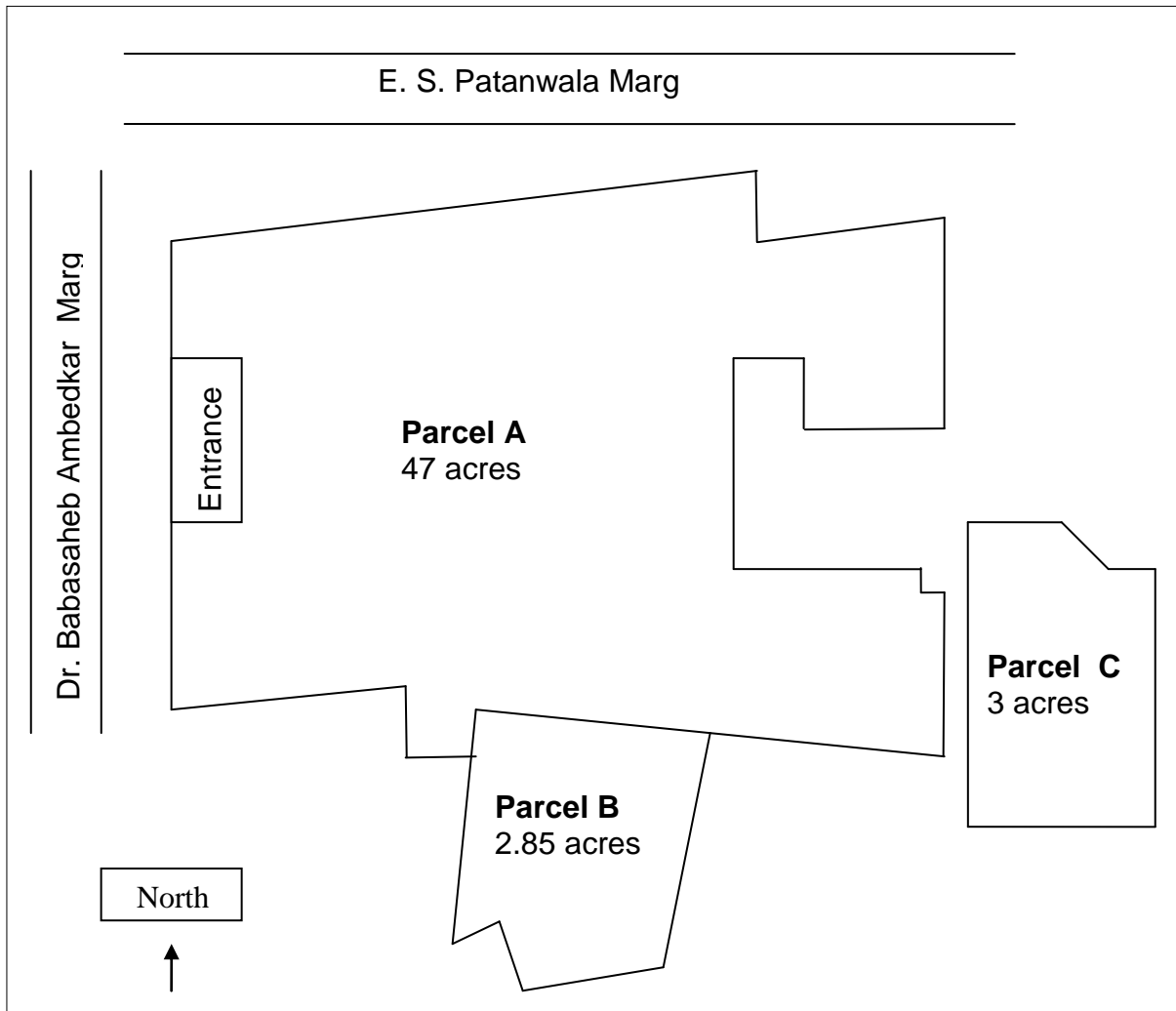


Mumbai's beloved heritage botanical garden

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Map of V.J.B. Udyan & Zoo, Byculla, Mumbai

















Parcel A : 47 acres (Main Garden & zoo area)

Parcel B : 2.85 acres (Miller Compound)

Parcel C : 3 acres (Podar Mill compound)

**Total area : 52.85 acres
(A+B+C)**

Salient features of V.J.B. Udyan Zoo (Rani Bagh)

-  149 Year-old Botanical Garden of Mumbai City
-  Western India 's oldest botanical garden
-  Grade II-B heritage precinct as per serial number 530 in the Schedule of Heritage Regulations [laid out in Renaissance style]
-  Area: 53 acres (2,16,936 sq.mt. as per Expression of Interest document no. SGZ/627 of 19-07-2006)
-  Total area under garden: 1,21,270 sq.mt. - 56% of (as per Expression of interest document no. SGZ/627 of 19-07-2006)
-  Total area of enclosures: 35,000 sq.mt. - 16% (as per expression of interest document no. SGZ/627 of 19-07-2006)
-  Over 50 internal gardens of various sizes
-  A treasure house of trees
 - ✿ **No. of trees – 3213**
 - ✿ **Species of trees – 276**
 - ✿ **No. of plants species – 843**
 - ✿ **No. of families - 149**
 - ✿ **Largest number of trees and species at a single location in Mumbai**
 - ✿ **Virtually no vacant treeless space for construction activity**
-  A thriving habitat for small mammals, birds and insects
-  **Largest Accessible Open Public Green Space in Mumbai**
-  **An affordable public space (Entry fee Rs. 5/- for adults Rs. 2 for children)**
-  **8,000 visitors per day and 30,000 on holidays**
-  A valuable carbon sink and a bulwark against monsoon flooding the extensive soil cover acting as a precious soak region.
-  Received an open space heritage award from the Indian Heritage Society in December 2007

V.J.B. Udyan – A Botanical Garden



In May 2009 the Additional Municipal Commissioner shocked environmentalists with the ludicrous assertion that V.J.B. Udyan was not a botanical garden at all but was “only a garden”. Since the redevelopment plans would indeed destroy the botanical garden the MCGM sought this way of side-stepping its responsibility of preserving a heritage site.



This stance was condemned by us together with several environmental groups. We quote below our arguments to prove that V.J.B. Udyan is in fact a botanical garden.

✿ **The references in the Gazetteer :**

- ∞ The Gazetteer of Bombay City and Island Volume III :
“Victoria Gardens (as V.J.B. Udyan was then known) was set up in 1861 to establish a botanical garden in Bombay.”
- ∞ The Gazetteer of India Maharashtra State Greater Bombay District, Volume III
“Formerly known as the Victoria Gardens, Veermata Jijabai Bhosale Udyan is the oldest public garden in Bombay and stocked with plants from the Agro-Horticultural Society of Western Indian at Sewri which was maintained up to 1862 when its plants were transferred to the Victoria Gardens.”

✿ **The MCGM’s website:**

- ∞ The MCGM’s very website states that the V.J.B. Udyan is a botanical garden.
- ∞ It lists out the duties of the Superintendent of Gardens as:
 - Maintenance of Veermata Jijabai Bhosale Udyan-Zoo as a public botanic garden and zoo
 - Conservation of Rare/Exotic species of flora
 - Procuring new variety of flora
 - Provide plant material for educational purposes
 - Propagation and sale of plants.

✿ **The website of Indian Botanical Gardens Network (IBGN)**

V.J.B. Udyan Zoo is one of the 75 registered botanical gardens in India with Indian Botanical Gardens Network (IBGN), its code being “MA-VJBUZ”

✿ **The website of Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI)**

According to Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI) there are around 131 botanical gardens in India and V.J.B. Udyan is listed as one of them.



The Additional Municipal Commissioner has personally accepted an award (Open Space, Botanical garden maintained with dedication) for the botanical garden of V.J.B. Udyan from the Indian Heritage Society in December 2007.



The chief criterion for a botanical garden, viz the existence of a huge number of trees and tree species is fulfilled by V.J.B. Udyan. At no other location in the city can one find 3,213 trees of 276 species.

V.J.B. Udyan – A Botanical Garden under serious threat



The MCGM has announced plans to set up an “international zoo” at the cost of **Rs. 600 crore** -

- ✿ **A huge budget** – Expenditure around **Rs. 11 crore per acre**.
- ✿ With the great financial crunch faced by MCGM and the severe water shortage looming large over the city, scarce funds should be utilised for public issues like health, education etc.
- ✿ Most zoos in the country are renovated at a cost of 5-7 crore whereas the redevelopment price tag for V.J.B. Udyan is Rs. 600 crore
- ✿ The allocation in the Municipal Budget for the financial year 2010-2011 is stated to be Rs. 192 crore.
- ✿ A makeover plan developed by HKS Designer and Consultant International (a Thai-based Malaysian company) at a fee of Rs. 4 crore.
- ✿ Makeover plan consists of
 - ☞ Children Exploration centre
 - ☞ Indian animal exhibits
 - ☞ African animal exhibits
 - ☞ South East Asian animal exhibits
 - ☞ Australian animal exhibits
 - ☞ Animal hospital
 - ☞ Underground car park
 - ☞ Glass walled restaurant
 - ☞ Administrative building in parcel B
 - ☞ Staff quarters in Parcel C.

Impact of makeover plan on V.J.B. Udyan



The flora of V.J.B. Udyan is under severe threat due to **proposed extensive construction activity throughout the entire verdant garden** thickly covered with trees, shrubs, herbs and creepers. Please examine existing layout drawing called 'existing site plan and trees' and Final proposed master plan of V.J.B. Udyan

- ❁ **All existing pathways are proposed to be destroyed and new pathways proposed to be constructed.**
- ❁ **All animal enclosures are proposed to be shifted without reason to new locations causing digging of new pathways, creating additional water bodies and damaging root system of trees.**
- ❁ The proposed dramatic increase in the number of animal enclosures will mean that new barriers will have to be constructed between animal enclosures and the public and between two adjacent animal enclosures. The nature of this barrier has not been specified by the MCGM authorities. However, in most zoos this barrier consists of moats. **Moats pose a very real danger to existing age-old intertwined root systems. The proposed layout drawings are silent on the exact dimensions of moats.**
- ❁ **The proposed construction of several new animal enclosures, holding areas, water bodies and mounds in the botanical garden will certainly harm the trees (even if they are not physically cut).**
- ❁ **The construction of new service roads, moats, new electrification, plumbing, fresh water, sewage and storm water lines will lead to a high level of rubble that can endanger trees apart from being a gross waste of resources.**
- ❁ A huge quantity of earth needs to be imported to fill the existing water bodies.
- ❁ The entire age-old layout of the botanical garden built in Renaissance axial planning style will be destroyed forever



Around 1,100 trees are envisaged to be included inside proposed animal enclosures and several others will be inaccessible beyond service roads.



The public will lose access to a huge number of trees and garden area. A botanical garden where access to trees is denied is a cruel travesty.



Botany students of 50 colleges in Mumbai have historically used V.J.B. Udyan as an open laboratory for their field work and taxonomical study. As the largest and most diverse botanical garden in the city, V.J.B. Udyan's botanical garden needs special preservation.



After spending the astronomical amount of Rs. 600 crore, the entry fee will rise

dramatically. It is ironical that even as public funds to the tune of Rs. 600 crore are sought to be spent most common citizens will be unable to afford the revised entry fee. **Thus a 149 year old egalitarian park will become a play ground for the rich.**

In sum, a comparison of the existing layout plan and the Final Proposed Master Plan shows that the entire campus of V.J.B. Udyan has been altered beyond recognition. Every existing pathway, animal enclosure and internal garden has been summarily erased. It is as if the designers have submitted a design for a barren landscape rather than for one which houses a heritage botanical garden. This is the fundamental flaw in the very conceptualization of this ill-conceived, grandiose scheme.

MCGM's disregard of botanical garden



Ever since the redevelopment proposal idea has been mooted the MCGM has in many ways displayed its disregard for the botanical garden.

- ❁ The terms of reference inviting the **tender for the redevelopment proposal design makes no mention of the botanical garden and does not require that a Botanist be involved in the redevelopment plan.** This demonstrates that the MCGM attached no value whatsoever to the botanical garden and the entire redevelopment exercise is aimed at setting up an international zoo alone.
- ❁ The Additional Municipal Commissioner has been on record since July 2007 to say that the redevelopment would be done without cutting a single tree. **The first master plan submitted in 2007, however, clearly envisaged the total destruction of the botanical garden as is amply borne out by CZA expert committee Patnaik-Mehta report.** That is, even as the AMC knew that the plan sent for approval would destroy the garden he assured citizens that not a single tree would be cut.
- ❁ **After the CZA prohibited the removal/transplantation of all vegetation including tree bushes and creepers the AMC announced that “diseased trees” would be cut.** Thereafter, upon our request the BNHS conducted a survey and found that only 14 trees had some form of fungus infection that could easily be treated. Environmental groups protested vehemently against this backdoor method of felling trees. Thereafter, the MCGM refrained from making such assertions.
- ❁ In April 2009 after we had made a formal representation before the Mumbai Heritage Conservation Committee the AMC asserted that V.J.B. Udyan was not a botanical garden at all but was “only a garden” This assertion was repeated time and again in print and in comments to the media, Even on February 17, 2010 when we met the Municipal Commissioner with Mr. D.M. Sukthankar and Mr. S. Kale the AMC continued to assert that V.J.B. Udyan was not a botanical garden. MCGM's denial of the existence of the botanical garden is a tactical and calculated move to push its redevelopment plans. **It is clear that if the MCGM accepts the existence of the heritage botanical garden then, as its custodian, it has an onus to protect it. If the botanical garden is to be protected, then the international zoo plan has to be discarded, as V.J.B. Udyan has no vacant treeless space to accommodate an international zoo.**
- ❁ **Alarming shrinkage in number of rare trees: The final proposed master plan shows a mere 22 trees of 6 species as ‘rare trees’. An earlier document furnished by the BMC itself showed 936 trees of 152 species as ‘rare trees’.** Clearly, this huge difference is another attempt to denigrate the importance of V.J.B. Udyan as a botanical garden. This is one more attempt to downplay the botanical garden. The MCGM does has not explained this flagrant discrepancy.

Conditional Approval by Central Zoo Authority (CZA)



The Central Zoo Authority (CZA), the statutory body to regulate the zoos in India, had in October 2007 sent two experts, Mr. S.K. Patnaik and Dr. Rommel Mehta, to conduct a site visit. Their report is an unequivocal condemnation of the master plan and clearly states that the existing botanical garden will be destroyed if the plan were to be implemented. **It asserts that 53 acres is too small an area for the number of animal species envisaged in the plan** and that these cannot be accommodated “without almost completely doing away with all these trees and structures”.



Thereafter, the CZA directed the MCGM to recast the plan and issued four stringent conditions to protect the vegetation. The recast plan eliminated some of the deep excavations and mounds but did not, in any material way, reduce the number of proposed animal enclosures. **This plan was surprisingly approved by the CZA on 11 August 2009 with the following conditions:**

- 1) **All the structures/animal enclosures created at the zoo as per the approved Master Layout plan of 2001 should be retained but may be modified/improved marginally**, if necessary with the approval of the Central Zoo Authority.
- 2) Considering the heritage value related to the antiquity of V.J.B. Udyan-zoo, it must be ensured that **implementation of the new Master (layout) Plan should not carry out felling/removal/transplantation of any vegetation including trees, shrubs and creepers. Also no activity should be undertaken which affects the life of vegetation in short or long term.** This would relate to the proposed massive earth fillings and equally large areas of excavation.
- 3) In case, any realignment of any enclosures or structures is to be made for retaining the vegetation, the same should have got prior approval of this office.
- 4) It should be ensured that all existing heritage structures are not damaged/modified without obtaining permission from appropriate authorities.
- 5) Species like Lion tailed macaque, Nilgiri langur and Sun bear should be replaced by the common species of the area or area allotted for such species may be developed as greenery.
- 6) Suitable arrangement should be made to protect trees in the enclosures meant for African and Indian hoofed stock.



Concerns regarding CZA approval:

- ✿ In actual practice, MCGM will certainly not be able to comply with the condition

no 2 of CZA approval, that the redevelopment should not involve felling/removal/transplantation of any vegetation and no activity should be undertaken which affects the life of vegetation in short or long term.

Granting approval with such a condition when the layout plan clearly shows that all internal gardens, animal enclosures, pathways, hedges etc. will be totally altered, thereby definitely destroying trees, bushes and creepers is meaningless. As soon as the proposed work commences and internal gardens and hedges are dug up this condition will stand violated.

- ✿ It is shocking that the CZA has chosen to overlook its own condition that “all the structures/animal enclosures created at the zoo as per the approved Master Layout plan of 2001 should be retained but may be modified/improved marginally, if necessary”. The plan approved by CZA clearly shows that these enclosures have not been retained and have been drastically modified.
- ✿ The concept of granting conditional approval is a flawed one. **As per the directions issued by the MoEF the practice of granting conditional approval is fraught with danger and should be strictly eschewed.**

Conditions imposed by Mumbai Heritage Conservation Committee



As V.J.B. Udyan is a Grade II-B heritage site, it is mandatory for any redevelopment proposal to have formal Mumbai Heritage Conservation Committee (MHCC) approval.

- We had two comprehensive hearings before the MHCC to show with the help of a variety of layout drawings obtained under RTI how the makeover plan would ring the death knell of the botanical garden.
- At the second hearing on 10 September 2009, Mr. D.M. Sukhtankar, former Municipal Commissioner, former Chief Secretary Maharashtra and former Chairman MHCC and Mr. Sharad Kale former Municipal Commissioner, and current Chairman of the Pune Heritage Committee, were also present and voiced their vehement opposition to the redevelopment proposal.



On 20 June 2009 the MHCC issued 13 fairly stringent conditions to be incorporated into the master plan chief among which are:

- 1) The total 'green' coverage as in existence should not be reduced in terms of area.
- 2) The percentage of 'green' area accessible to the public as on today should not be reduced.
- 3) The proposed plan should be superimposed on the existing 'Tree Survey' so as to indicate the impact of the proposed plan on the existing trees.
- 4) The character of V.J.B. Udyan as a botanical garden and its sanctity & educational importance should be preserved.



Thereafter, the MCGM resubmitted plans which purportedly fulfilled the conditions mentioned above but were in reality identical to the plans submitted previously. In January 2010, the MHCC asked for further detailed drawings and in February 2010 the MCGM submitted a slightly revised layout drawing retaining some element of the required axial planning. However, apart from this minor change the entire layout remained the same. **That is, the threat to the botanical garden from the proposed makeover remained.**



In February 2010 the MHCC appointed two experts to guide them - Dr. Asad Rahamani, Director BNHS and Dr. M.R. Almeida, an eminent Botanist. These experts met the Municipal Commissioner and the project consultants and came down heavily on the proposed plan, cautioning against going ahead with the redevelopment scheme. **In fact, at this meeting the Municipal Commissioner finally accepted the fact that V.J.B. Udyan was set up as a botanical garden in 1861 and continued to enjoy the same status today.** Please examine Dr. Asad Rahamani letter dated March 5, 2010 and Dr. Almeida's letters dated March 15, 2010 and March 18, 2010



On April 15, 2010 members of the Save Rani Bagh Botanical Garden Action Committee were invited for a field visit by the Chairman of the MHCC, Shri D. Afzalpurkar. Apart from members of the MHCC, the two MHCC-appointed experts, Shri Almeida and Shri Rahmani were present. MHCC members were shown an

internal garden that actually had several trees thereby contradicting BMC's tree survey map which showed that that internal garden had no trees whatsoever. They were also shown one internal garden by way of example to demonstrate that internal gardens purportedly shown as inaccessible to the public were actually accessible. Most importantly, MHCC members were taken to the nursery near the snake house where construction activity has commenced without MHCC's explicit approval.



On 19 May 2010, the MHCC sent a very strongly worded letter to the BMC virtually asking for the botanical garden to be maintained "as it exists today". Please examine MHCC's definitive letter dated 19 May 2010. This statement amounts to a rejection of the redevelopment proposal and is a total vindication of the Save Rani Bagh Botanical Garden Action Committee's stand. Some of the chief points are mentioned below:

- ❁ **"The MHCC maintains that the character and status of V.J.B. Udyan as a botanical garden needs to be recognized, accepted and preserved by the MCGM"**. Mention is made of the fact that the previous MHCC had recorded that the term botanical garden be included under the 'Special Features' column in the Heritage list.
- ❁ The MHCC pointedly questioned the veracity of virtually all data furnished by the MCGM including percentage of garden area open to public and closed to public and percentage of roads and pathways viz a viz the total area. Detailed accounts were given of the faulty comparison methodology.
- ❁ The existing habitat of trees shrubs and creepers that has developed over the past 150 years would stand destroyed with the proposed redevelopment.
- ❁ Strong objection was taken to the unauthorised construction activity in the old nursery area near the snake house. The MHCC stressed that it was not a temporary structure as made out by the MCGM officials. It was pointed that if so much vegetation was destroyed during construction activity in such a limited area then "the level of sweeping changes and new construction would bring about severe damage to existing vegetation" and "seriously endanger" the preservation of V.J.B. Udyan as a botanical garden.
- ❁ Strong objection was taken to the proposed filling up of existing water bodies and the creation of numerous new ones citing serious danger to roots systems.
- ❁ Objection was taken to the digging 46 trial pits without MHCC's due approval of the redevelopment proposal.
- ❁ The tree survey data and map furnished by the MCGM was found wanting in accuracy and content and a fresh survey using modern GPS systems was ordered.
- ❁ The single pathway concept proposed for the public was undesirable given the huge number of visitors each day.
- ❁ "Deep concern" was expressed regarding the likelihood of a steep rise in entry fee which would deprive the common Mumbai citizen of visiting the heritage garden.
- ❁ **"The best course of action would be to alter the existing animal enclosures in the way that does not invade the greenery so as to improve the condition of the animals and preserve the botanical garden as it exists today."**

Our objections to MCGM's resubmitted plan to Mumbai Heritage Conservation Committee



The Save Rani Bagh Botanical Garden Action Committee and Shri Sukthankar made a careful analysis of the so-called Final Master Plan and submitted detailed letters dated February 24, 2010 and March 11, 2010 respectively.



Listed below are some of the important issues raised:

- ❁ Total disregard of MHCC's 13 conditions particularly regarding, sanctity and educational importance of botanical garden and botanical garden area accessible to the public.
- ❁ **Marked variation in the figures furnished for garden area, pathways and total area in different documents submitted by MCGM.** Therefore, there is an urgent need to appoint an external independent Government-recognised agency to furnish authentic data on these areas to enable a careful examination of the same.
- ❁ Existing layout has wide arterial pathways and numerous smaller pathways branching in all directions ensuring free and easy movement of visitors. The redevelopment proposal envisages one continuous pathway that may lead to a stampede-like situation on days when large crowds gather.
- ❁ **All existing animal enclosures, even newly renovated ones, are proposed to be demolished and new ones constructed leading to a high level of rubble that can endanger trees, apart from being a gross waste of resources.**
- ❁ **Existing water bodies are proposed to be filled up and new ones created, once again leading to creation of unnecessary rubble and digging within the garden area.**
- ❁ Many trees are seen on the boundary of the enclosures and on proposed pathways. How will these be protected from construction activity? **The Layout plan is silent on the kind of barriers envisaged between animal enclosures and public pathways.**
- ❁ **No details as to the width, depth and height of the water bodies, moats, mounds, etc. are indicated in the Plans.**
- ❁ Several internal gardens shown as inaccessible are in fact open to the public.
- ❁ Vague proposed new green areas shown – e.g. roof garden
- ❁ Lawns, roof gardens, shrubbery is no substitute for a heritage botanical garden with age old majestic trees of 276 species.

Our struggle

We are a band of nature lovers and committed citizens who set out in April 2007 to come together as a committee to protect the 53 acre botanical garden of the V.J.B. Udyan Zoo, popularly known as Rani Bagh.

Charted below are the main steps in the trajectory of our struggle thus far:



In July 2007 **we set up a website** (www.saveranibagh.org). **We hosted an on-line petition** demanding that the botanical garden be preserved intact, that not a single tree be cut and that the entry fee not be hiked.



The on-line petition has so far been signed by over 9,000 citizens.



We set out by filing various applications under the Right to Information Act which yielded some valuable data.



We conducted awareness programmes in schools, colleges and workplaces through tree trails in V.J.B. Udyan and audiovisual shows.



We wrote numerous letters to the Municipal Commissioner, the Superintendent of Gardens, the Central Zoo Authority (CZA), the Ministry of Environment and Forests and to the Mumbai Heritage Conservation Committee.



We garnered support from environmental groups like BNHS, WWF-India, Sanctuary Asia, City Space, Aawaz Foundation and BEAG who issued joint press statements, and addressed joint press meets.



We formally met the Municipal Commissioner, the Additional Municipal Commissioner, CZA authorities, MHCC members and the Minister of Environment and Forests, Shri Jairam Ramesh.



Our sustained campaign over the past three years, together with support of a wide range of environmental bodies, has compelled the MCGM to revise their plan several times. Many of these changes, however, were superficial – the final master plan submitted to the MHCC in February 2010 continued to pose a very real danger to the very existence of the botanical garden and the health of its flora.



The final rejection of the redevelopment proposal by the MHCC in May 2010 has come as a shot in the arm for the struggle to preserve the botanical garden and its accessibility by common citizens.

Solidarity



Since the inception of our struggle, **we have received support, encouragement and guidance from environmental and public-spirited citizens' groups such as BNHS, WWF-India, Sanctuary Asia, CitiSpace, Oval Trust, NAGAR, Aawaz Foundation, AGNI, UDRI, Clean Air, Indian Heritage Society and BEAG**, who joined us for press meets, issued joint press statements and addressed several letters of objection to the makeover plan and of support to our struggle to protect the botanical garden. It is to be noted that most of these organizations have a large support base and, in some cases like CitiSpace and AGNI, also have hundreds of constituent local level bodies as their members.



Various retired judges, officials and representatives of environmental and open space NGOs signed an 'Open Letter to the Chief Minister' dated 6 July 2009 protesting against MCGM's makeover of V.J.B. Udyan.



We have also received a solidarity statement from Dr. Nigel Talyor, Curator of the Royal Kew Gardens, UK, the final word on botanical gardens worldwide.



On March 1, 2010 we visited the Minister of MoEF Shri Jairam Ramesh who penned a letter to the Chief Minister Maharashtra categorically stating that he "saw merit in the stand taken by the Save Rani Bagh Botanical Garden Action Committee" and requested him to meet committee members and help to preserve the botanical garden.





A host of botanists has testified to the fact that V.J.B. Udyan is a living open laboratory for their study and field trips. In particular, Dr. Almeida, Maharashtra's foremost Botanist, and author of the five-volume work 'Flora of Maharashtra', has issued a strong statement against the makeover.



Common citizens and eminent personalities have time and again come forward with offers of help and expressions of solidarity.


Current status


 The Central Zoo Authority (CZA) has granted conditional approval to the makeover plan on 11 August 2009. However, in September 2010 it has sent a review team to look into our complaints regarding violation of CZA conditions whose report is awaited.


 In February 2010 the MHCC consulted two experts, Dr. Asad Rahmani, Director BNHS and Dr. M.R. Almeida, an eminent botanist, both of whom came down heavily against BMC's proposed redevelopment. On May 19, 2010 the MHCC rejected the redevelopment proposal in no uncertain terms and stated thus: **“The best course of action would be to alter the existing animal enclosures in the way that does not invade the greenery so as to improve the condition of the animals and preserve the botanical garden as it exists today.”**


 **.Despite there being no formal approval for the makeover from the MHCC, a tender for Rs. 34.29 crore has been awarded to M/s. Technotrade Impex India Ltd for the work under Phase I as under:**


- 1) Development of infrastructure
- 2) Civil construction and landscaping around the administrative building
- 3) Wall fence
- 4) Service road &
- 5) Hospital commissary and quarantine areas

 **Despite there being no approval for the makeover from the MHCC, construction activity has commenced in the botanical garden area** purportedly to build a 'temporary' animal hospital. The MHCC has strongly criticized this premeditated activity and called for a halt to the construction but recent reports indicate that the construction is continuing. Full scale construction on a plot called Parcel B where MCGM intends to construct an administrative building is going on since November 2009. Our string objection to this has been brought to the notice of both MCGM and MHCC.

 **In spite of a severe financial crisis, Rs 192 crore has been allocated towards zoo renovation in the MCGM budget for the financial year 2010-2011.**

 In July 2010 the MCGM approached Prof. Almeida to identify the trees and shrubs so as to redress the mistakes in the existing data. This survey shows that the botanical garden is home to 843 species of plants belonging to 149 botanical families (including 3,213 trees of 276 species).

 News reports indicate that the MCGM is in the process of drafting a fresh redevelopment proposal. This fresh plan will necessarily require the approval of CZA and MHCC afresh.

 The Save Rani Bagh Botanical Garden Action Committee awaits these plans under the RTI Act and will evaluate them in accordance with its primary concern of preserving the heritage 149 year old botanical garden and its accessibility for posterity.

Our Appeal



A botanical garden by its intrinsic nature is location specific. Animals can be shifted.

- ✿ We suggest that large animals like elephants and the lionesses be shifted to Sanjay Gandhi National park or to an alternate location and smaller animals, birds and snakes can continue to be housed in V.J.B. Udyan.
- ✿ In this way, both botanical garden and zoo can continue to co-exist and the MCGM can utilise the huge amount of Rs. 433 crore for other needs such as health, education, housing etc.



The botanical garden was set up in 1861. In 1873, when animals were brought in to add to the pageantry of nature there, the then British Government added 15 acres to the botanical garden thereby creating additional space. Though the MCGM has acquired the areas denoted as Parcel B and Parcel C for the extension of V.J.B. Udyan totaling nearly six acres, these have been earmarked for a new administrative building and staff quarters respectively. These two areas can easily be used to add new animal enclosures if the MCGM so wishes. The MCGM is very soon due to acquire 7.5 acres from Mafatlal Mills for V.J.B. Udyan expansion. This acreage can also be used to house new animal enclosures if the MCGM so wishes. In this way the botanical garden can stand preserved for future generations.

Our Appeal

- 1. The CZA ought to review its farcical ‘conditional approval’ accorded to the redevelopment proposal.**
 - ✿ It is clearly impossible to implement the redevelopment plan without “felling/removal/transplantation of any vegetation including trees, shrubs and creepers”.
 - ✿ To add a rider saying “no activity should be undertaken which affects the life of vegetation in short or long term” even as it permits construction activity on a massive scale and the creation of several new animal enclosures, is only playing with words.
- 2. The MCGM ought to give up the exercise of the makeover plan to convert a botanical garden into a zoo and, if necessary, set up a new zoo to international standards at a different location** where trees will not be endangered and a botanical garden not forever lost to the city. In this way Mumbai can have a full fledged zoo and a heritage botanical garden. We appeal to all citizens to urge the MCGM to act as a responsible custodian of a public heritage botanical garden and to discard the dangerous proposal of redevelopment.

3. **An independent MoEF expert team of environmentalists and botanists should conduct a site visit and furnish a fact finding report** detailing the long term and short term environmental effect of establishing an international zoo in V.J.B. Udyan as envisaged by the Municipal authorities.

4. **The Maharashtra state government should locate a large acreage on the outskirts of the city** if the need is felt to set up a zoo to international standards for Mumbai.

The year 2011-12 marks V.J.B. Udyan's 150th anniversary. Our aim is to strive to ensure that Mumbai's largest and oldest botanical garden stands inviolate and proud for future generations.