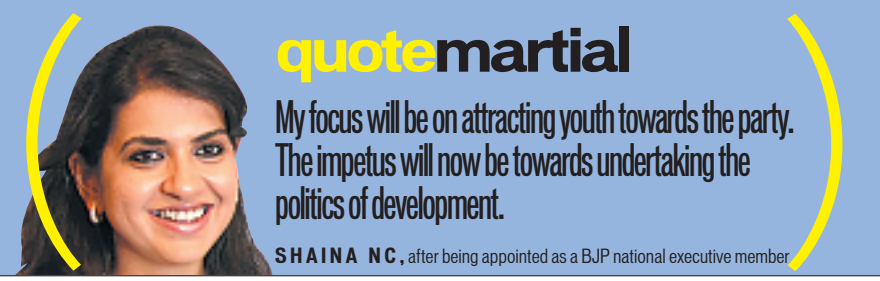


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ONLINE ADMISSIONS POLICY FOR JUNIOR COLLEGES

Delay irks students, colleges

TOO LATE Parents, principals say process should have been finalised three months ago

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MUMBAI: The delay by the state government in issuing the final online admission policy for junior colleges has irked students, parents and college authorities alike.

Parents and colleges pointed out that the process should have been finalised a long time ago. "The training for schools should have been done earlier, by December-end. Now, after the exams, students will be on holiday," said KA Viswanathan, trustee of SIES College.

The draft policy has to be approved by state Education Minister Balasaheb Thorat, who recently lost his father. The minister is currently in mourning and could not be reached for comment.

To ensure a smooth online process, the government has proposed training four to five teachers in each school who will, in turn, guide the students. But school authorities pointed out that it would be difficult to con-

duct training sessions for students once the board exams are over. "Teachers will get busy preparing for the next term. We have not slotted any time for training students," said a school principal.

Students too are peeved at the possibility of disruptions in their post-exam holidays. "I have already made plans to go on a holiday. I cannot cancel my plans if my school asks me to come in for a training session," said an SSC student, requesting anonymity.

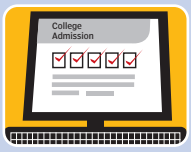
"Students should have the option of submitting paper forms too. Once the relevant data is in, anyone can feed it online," said Jayant Jain, president of the Forum for Fairness in Education.

Some other changes have also been proposed this year. Students can choose a minimum of five and a maximum of 25 colleges when listing their admission preferences on the form. Last year, they could give up to 150 choices. Students can opt for two streams in one college too.

DUMMY'S GUIDE TO ONLINE ADMISSIONS



STUDENTS WILL have to log on to a government website to fill admission forms. Four or five teachers from each school will be trained to help students with the forms, putting the onus on schools rather than junior colleges



STUDENTS MUST choose a minimum of 5 and a maximum of 25 colleges when listing admission preferences. Earlier, they could give up to 150 choices. Students can opt for two streams in one college



COLLEGES WILL have a single code number. Last year, colleges had different numbers depending on whether they were aided or unaided, the streams they offered, etc. Information booklet, due soon, will have details of colleges listed ward-wise and stream-wise.

PROPOSED CHANGES

- No paper forms or submission centres like last year. Entire process will be online
- Minority quota seats left vacant in religious and linguistic minority colleges will be surrendered to Department of Education
- There will be guidance centres to help students applying through sports quota or disabled categories



GLITCHES SORTED OUT?

Maharashtra Knowledge Corporation Ltd (MKCL), which conducted the online admissions last year, will do so this year as well. MKCL is promoted by the Department of Higher and Technical Education, Maharashtra.

"Now, even if every student logs on to the server at the same time, it will be able to handle the load," said Manik Gutke, special officer on duty to the education minister. "The aim is to ensure that last year's glitches are not repeated."

MKCL rapped last year due to problems like a server crash, students not getting into colleges of their choice despite scoring well, getting admitted to Marathi-medium colleges despite opting for English-medium ones.



COLLEGES' QUOTA DEMAND

LAST YEAR, students in schools that had a junior college had to go through the online process even if they wished to continue in the same institution

SUCH INSTITUTIONS have the right to reserve 20 per cent of their seats in each stream for in-house students

THIS YEAR, colleges have demanded that they be given the right to decide which of their own students get to stay on in their junior college

BEST AND WORST OF ONLINE ADMISSIONS

- PROS**
 - Backdoor admissions stopped
 - Load taken off junior colleges
 - Students did not have to waste time or money to visit colleges and file applications
 - Even distribution of junior college seats across Mumbai
 - Reservation policy implemented
 - Fair allotment of colleges as per students' scores
- CONS**
 - Students could not apply to different streams in a college
 - Lack of clarity on how to use Internet, fill form
 - Deputy director's office, only authority on the system in the city, overworked. Earlier, colleges were responsible for their admissions
 - Principals could not admit students under cultural, sport quotas as per their rules. Earlier, colleges could admit students whose potential could be maximised by them. For instance, Ruparel College does not have a hockey team, but it must give preference to a hockey player. Though it has theatre activities, it cannot give preference to students from a performing arts background.

Cyclists say it's a good start

SAFE RIDE Applaud MMRDA's move, say city's crowded roads need such tracks



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MUMBAI: Bicycling enthusiasts, who have been demanding cycling lanes, have something to cheer about with the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority's (MMRDA) plan to set up a 0-12 km cycling lane in Bandra-Kurla Complex (BKC).

But the move has evoked mixed reactions from cyclists. Most cyclists lauded the MMRDA's plan. Retired airline employee and Bandra resident Brian D'Souza, who has been cycling for 40 years now, said he is really glad. "A lane in BKC will go a long way in making the roads safer for cyclists and getting the traffic to take us more seriously," the 70-year-old said.

"It is a good start," said 38-year-old Firoza Suresh, an advertising and event management executive and member of the Cycling to Work

group. "With infrastructure in place more people will take to cycling. And this will really take the attention off women like me, who use the cycle for the every day commute."

Anil Uchil, (39), the director of a corporate communications firm, who cycles from Mulund to nearly everywhere, thinks the cycling track could lead to a culture of pick-and-drop facilities for cycles of office goers.

Some others, however, felt BKC is not the right choice for a cycling track.

"I am surprised that the track is in BKC, which is a destination, not a transit road," said 32-year-old Amit Bhowmik, founder of cyclist.in.

Musician and avid cyclist, O.J. Nelson, said having cycling lanes along the relatively empty roads of BKC made little sense. "These lanes would be better appreciated on crowded roads with lots of pedestrian traffic," said the 30-year-old.

There are also concerns about maintaining the cycling track. "Let's not forget that the cycling lane in Thane has been taken over by hawkers now," said Sonu K. (25), an executive with a multi-national company, who cycles from her home in Malad to her workplace in Jogeshwari.

Bhowmik agrees that there needs to be a proper demarcation of the track. "A smarter idea would have been to create these lanes near colleges. It's important to target the right end user or else the plan will fail," he said.

The announcement has, however, brought hope to those who have been waiting for cycling tracks to come up in their localities. Entrepreneur Faisal Thakur (36) is hoping that the Khar Bandra and Santacruz Association's proposal to have a 12.5-km long cycling lane in these suburbs will also be approved.

CYCLISTS' WISH LIST

- Safe parking spaces.
- Incentives for companies to have changing rooms, showers, parking spaces near work place.
- Major roads, such as S.V. Road and Linking Road, which have heavy vehicle and pedestrian traffic should have lanes for cyclists, since pedestrians are toughest to navigate through.
- Proper utilisation of cycling lanes. The cycling lane in Thane has been taken over by hawkers.
- There should be a cycling lane on the expressway or arterial roads in Fort, Vile Parle, Santa Cruz where there is a lot of traffic.
- Approve the proposal by the Khar Bandra and Santacruz Association to have a 12.5-km long cycling lane in these suburbs. The plan and map have been submitted to the deputy commissioner of police (traffic).



The cycling track at Thane has been encroached upon by hawkers. COURTESY: V RAMESH

Thane cycling lane changes track

It was inaugurated in 2007 on a trial basis. Three years later, the 2-km cycling track at Wagale Estate is in a shambles. "It is used by hawkers and for parking cars," said V. Ramesh, founder and chief executive officer of Ecomove, a cycling service.

The Thane Municipal Corporation says the track was not successful because it was too short.

The corporation had in December 2008 proposed a

longer, 53-km dedicated cycle lane along the city's service roads and Ghodbunder Road. The state government approved it but it is awaiting sanction from the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission. "We have proposed a dedicated, parallel cycle track along Gokhale road, Saket Road and Pokhran Road among others," said a TMC official requesting anonymity.

SUSAMMA KURIAN

HC raps state govt for not filing affidavits on time

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MUMBAI: The state government got an earful from the Bombay High Court on Wednesday for not filing an affidavit in a public interest litigation on time.

Irked by the lackadaisical attitude of government officers in replying to a PIL alleging irregularities in disbursement of relief package offered by the Prime Minister for Vidarbha farmers, the high court has given one last warning to the officers concerned.

If the officers do not reply on time, the high court would impose cost which the officers would have to pay.

Justice F.I. Rebello said: "We are going to make it clear; that in future this kind of attitude will not be tolerated. We propose to impose heavy cost on the officer concerned, if they fail to file an affidavit after seeking an adjournment they will have to pay the cost from their own pocket."

On earlier two occasions, government pleader had sought time to reply to the PIL filed by city-based NGO Janhit Manch alleging irregularities in disbursing aid meant for families of suicide affected farmers and for farmers who fall below the poverty line.

On Wednesday, the court was irked after the additional government pleader once again sought more time to file the affidavit. Pointing out that the government had taken time earlier too, Justice Rebello said: "If this happens we will impose heavy cost on the officer concerned."

ANOTHER CASE

- A PIL filed by Nivrutti Bahikar in 2009 alleged that there were several irregularities in the appointment of members of Labour Welfare Board.
- The high court asked the government to take action against the board members concerned, but nothing was done.
- Following the government's inaction, the HC has directed the secretary of the Labour ministry to be present in court on Thursday.
- "Officers come here (make statements) and then go home and sleep peacefully in their beds. There is no responsibility and no accountability," observed Justice F.I. Rebello.

Janhit Manch has alleged that the special financial package announced by the PM in September, 2008, for benefit of the farmers in Vidarbha did not reach the beneficiaries. The NGO alleged that the aid was claimed by well-to-do farmers.

Of the total beneficiaries of 10,637 families, only 2,924 families appears to be the real beneficiary of this special package, alleges PIL.

The PIL prays that the HC should direct the government and the animal husbandry department — which are responsible for disbursing the aid — to ensure that the aid reaches the needy farmers and their families.

A division bench of Justice Rebello and Justice Amjad Sayed will hear the matter after two weeks.

INTERVIEW S.V.R. SRINIVAS 'If this works, we'll have more'

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MUMBAI: The city's first cycling track may come up in Bandra-Kurla Complex in the next eight months, says the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority that planned the project. *Hindustan Times* speaks to Joint Metropolitan Commissioner, SVR. Srinivas, about the nitty-gritty.



COURTESY: MMRDA

in place. Bicycling is an energy saving, low carbon emission mode of transport. It is a small initiative on our part to promote environmentally friendly transportation systems.

Why is the track being built now?

We are developing BKC's infrastructure. It is imperative that such provisions are made at this time. If we decide to make this project 10 years down the line, the project cost will increase.

Will Mumbai have more such dedicated lanes?

This is our pilot project. If we get a favourable response, we will be more than willing to expand it to other areas.

By when will the cycling track be ready?

We are hoping to complete this 12-km long stretch in the next eight months. This track will move along the internal roads of Bandra Kurla Complex. The width will be similar to that of foot-paths.

How much will these dedicated tracks cost?

We have already made a provision of Rs 150 crore for improving BKC's internal roads. We are working on the cost of these tracks and will be floating tenders for the project in a month's time.

What is the need for setting up bicycle tracks?

Globally, such systems are

COURT TO POLICE 'Was convict 13 when he committed murder?'

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MUMBAI: The Bombay High Court on Wednesday ordered the Thane police (rural) to verify the birth certificate of a murder convict, who has claimed that he was 13-year-old when he was arrested for committing the crime.

A division bench of Justice Dilip Bhosale and Justice A.R. Joshi has given the police a week to verify the birth certificate submitted by the convict, Sunil Devram Mhase.

In May 2005, the Thane sessions court had convicted Mhase for a murder he had committed in 2004 and awarded him life imprisonment, apparently despite him claiming to be a juvenile and producing his birth certificate showing his date of birth as July 4, 1991.

The convict, who is serving the life term at Nashik Central Prison, had in January written a letter to the high court, which has now been converted into a petition.

In the letter he urged the high court to release him in accordance with the provisions of the Juvenile Justice Act.

His court-appointed lawyer, Murtaza Najmi, contended that he was convicted despite claiming to be a juvenile and submitting his birth certificate.

Najmi, however, added that the claim of he was juvenile could be considered even after conviction in accordance with a landmark ruling given by the high court. The matter will now come up for further hearing on March 24.