

Water supply: What did the BMC election manifestos promise in 2017?

At Citizen Matters, we review the promises made in the respective electoral manifestos by all four leading electoral parties, namely, the Shiv Sena (SS), the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Indian National Congress (INC) and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) ahead of the BMC elections in February 2022.

We review whether these promises made by them have been delivered, and where Mumbai currently stands on these issues. To kick start the series, we look at the promises made on the issue of providing clean and safe water supply.

Water requirement in Mumbai

Mumbai currently provides 188 litres per capita per day (lpcd) of water, which is higher than the 135 lpcd prescribed by the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), and yet, the city continues to be short on drinking water.

The city gets its water from seven impounded water resources in the neighbouring districts including Thane, Palghar and Nashik. To meet its burgeoning need, the city is now in the process of building more dams – Gargai and Pinjal – almost 195 kms away from the city, apart from the existing Damanganga dam project of the Central government.

[Activists](#) have been pointing out how Mumbai fails to access its own groundwater reserves for non-potable water uses. The city was looking at recycling treated sewage water for non-potable uses to reduce the burden of water shortage.

It's been able to provide only 3850 million litres per day of water as against the required need of 4505 MLD of water. About 30 % of the city's water continues to be wasted in leakages and thefts.

Who promised what in the previous election

In 2017, all political parties promised 24/7 water supply for all citizens in their election manifestos, a promise that does not seem to have been fulfilled. [Congress](#) and the [NCP](#) promised free water supply for all, though the NCP specified a limit of 700 litres of water per day.

The BJP promised to cancel the 8% annual hikes in water charges and to freeze the charges for five years. They also promised no water charges for upto 750 litres of water per day.

All parties, additionally, promised to set up sewage water treatment plants to get water for domestic, non-potable uses. In fact, the NCP suggested that drinking tap water would be banned from being used for domestic uses.

The Shiv Sena, BJP, NCP had also promised property tax concessions for housing societies that observe rainwater harvesting; a measure that is meant to help with the city's water shortage. NCP had promised Floor Space Index benefits in lieu of taking up rainwater harvesting measures.

The Shiv Sena had promised to revive old wells to augment water for non-potable uses, the NCP added that underground tanks would also be cleaned up for using the water for domestic use. The BJP promised to work to stop water thefts and leakages. It also promised a detailed study on water thefts and leakages to bring the unaccounted water supply to a complete halt. The Congress promised to make Mumbai tanker free and to install water meters for all. It promised water connection for all for just

Rs 1500. The BJP promised Right To Water and to provide tanker water for areas where tap water could not be provided.

Water is a critical issue and the All India Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen (AIMIM) [promised](#) 10 litres of mineral water for slum dwellers by setting up water treatment plants in slums.

What is the current status of these promises?

Currently, water supply is available only for a few hours everyday, in many parts of the city. There is a wide disparity between water distribution to slums and to non-slums areas, according to Praja Foundation's [report](#) on Status of Civic Issues in Mumbai-2021. They found that the average timing of water supply in the city in 2018 was only 5.4 hours and non-slum areas received more water (150 lpcpd) compared to slum areas (45 lpcpd).

Most residential complexes maintain their own storage tanks, which are filled and disbursed to residents using internal systems. "The political parties smartly cite this as 24X7 water supply because the BMC's water network continues to be old and inept to be charged all the time to handle high pressure water supply at all hours," Sitaram Shelar, convenor of Pani Haq Samiti, says. Getting a water connection continues to be complicated, non-transparent and random.

The Gargai and Pinjal dams that were meant to provide 1305 MLD (440 MLD from Gargai river dam and 865 MLD from Pinjal dam), to usher surplus water stocks thus bring in days of 24X7 water supply, continue to be stagnant since promises were made five years ago. The work on these dams has not started, and various clearances are yet to be received. As per the BMC's Environment Status Report (ESR) – 2020-21, while work on the Gargai dam may commence in 2022 and be completed by 2026, the Pinjal dam project may start by 2024 and complete only by 2028. The Damanganga dam-Pinjal river link project (1586 MLD) also continues to go through various stages of its conception.

Though BMC is supposed to introduce 100% metering of water, as part of adopting the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT), the island city continues to pay a lump sum "cost of service" as a part of the property tax, non-slums in suburbs pay are levied water charges.

In the midst of the pandemic, the BMC tried to [raise](#) charges, which was opposed by all political parties.

Only a few societies oversee Rain Water Harvesting (RWH) measures. Through an RTI report, Praja found that only 3209 units in Mumbai had adopted RWH as of October 2020. According to Ramesh Prabhu, chairman of Maharashtra Societies Welfare Association, there are an estimated 35,000 CHS in Mumbai city, of which about 10,000 of them are estimated to have come up post-2002 when the RWH was made mandatory for new buildings.

Instead of reviving the 18,911 identified wells in the city that could provide 378 MLD of water as per the ESR, RTI activists found that 84 wells in Kurla alone had [disappeared](#) on the ground, a euphemism for filling up wells and constructing over them.

"Following a year of low rainfall in 2009, the BMC found, renovated, and used water from 12,531 wells in the city in one month alone. With adequate maintenance, Mumbai's wells can continue to hydrate the city. Necessary policy changes can make everyday water insecurity and vulnerability, particularly for Mumbai's informal residents, a thing of the past." Nikhil Anand, author of Hydraulic City and associate professor of Anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania, [says](#).

The sewage treatment plants are far from providing water for domestic reuse. Municipal commissioner Iqbal Chahal in his 20-21 budget speech noted that so far only 10 MLD of such tertiary treated wastewater was available at the New Colaba Sewage treatment plant, which was proposed to supply 3 MLD to the nearby offices of Indian Navy for non-potable use as per their demand. The project has failed to make any headway beyond this.

The BMC did launch a desalination project, which could show results in a few years.

“New desalination plants consume lots of energy, raise sea temperatures and pollute water, causing harm to marine biodiversity,” observes Anand.

The leakages continue to be an issue even today as much as it did five years back. In fact, Praja white paper notes that

What do activists say about it?

Sitaram Shelar, who has helped inject issues on water in the election manifestos of certain parties, claims that most of the political parties do not take these seriously. “For most political parties, the manifestos are merely documents meant to be showcased for the educated electorates. It has no legal validity and therefore none of the parties take it seriously. Right before the elections, activists like us are generally called up by parties asking for opinions to be added into the manifestoes and these promises are forgotten once the election is won. Citizens themselves hardly bother to follow up or even know about the promises made during elections. Citizens continue to view themselves as subjects and fail to demand accountability from their rulers and are content with dole outs by the State.”

Link: <https://mumbai.citizenmatters.in/promises-in-congress-bjp-ncp-bmc-election-manifestos-2017-27478>