

## How Amin Patel became Mumbai's MLA No 1 five times

By Linah Baliga

Amin Patel, the MLA from Mumbai's Mumbadevi constituency, has been declared the Number 1 MLA in Mumbai for the fifth time by NGO Praja Foundation. Praja's report card evaluates various parameters including attendance, quality of questions asked, popularity, and development funds usage. Patel is known for his accessibility and policies that prioritize immediate action on citizens' issues. He has also been actively involved in social work, particularly in education and healthcare. Patel plans to continue his philanthropic efforts by starting a new multispecialty hospital and redeveloping Kamathipura.



The unassuming politician's journey began when he was elected a corporator in Dongri ward in 2002. In 2007, he became the chairman of Maulana Azad Finance Corporation and in 2009, first contested the assembly elections from the same ward. His forte, by all accounts is his easy accessibility to people, whatever the issue or crisis. (HT PHOTO)

MUMBAI: The Bhendi Bazarians call him the “Badshah of all MLAs”. In his Mumbadevi constituency, he is known as the “Pride of South Mumbai”. Given these sobriquets earned over the years, it's no surprise that Amin Patel was recently declared the Number 1 MLA in Mumbai for the fifth time by NGO Praja Foundation.

Praja's 'report card' delves into parameters like assembly attendance, quality of questions asked, popularity in the constituency and usage of area development funds as well as factors pertaining to educational qualifications and criminal records. “Praja appoints an agency to conduct a survey in constituencies before publishing the report,” said Patel.

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As a public representative, Patel has two policies that have earned him popularity and goodwill. “One practice I follow is to be available in the mornings,” he said. “Normally, MLAs are available only in the evenings. The other is that I don't write letters or mails and prolong issues—I immediately talk to or message the concerned officers and get citizens' problems sorted out the same day.”

Patel's achievements don't lie in resolving civic issues alone—he also does a great deal of social work, especially in the fields of education and health. “At the peak of the pandemic, I fed around 10,000 people daily,” he said, adding that it was not his money alone. “I would get 2,500 food packets from Taj Hotel catering and Iskcon would contribute another 2,500. Thakker restaurant and NGOs too pitched in. There are a lot of slums on P D'mello Road and some 2,500 people were fed there itself. The handcart pullers at Chor Bazar were also fed every day. We also gave ration kits to many people.”

The MLA was also the first to start an oxygen cylinder bank in collaboration with ambulance services during the pandemic. “There was a shortage of beds in hospitals during this grim time so we started this service to people's homes,” he said.

Patel, as a matter of principle, tries not to miss a single day of assembly. “My attendance is almost 100 percent,” he said. “I debate issues and since I am the deputy leader of the Congress, I don't raise issues for the heck of it. Whatever I say in the House is backed by thorough research.”

Patel belongs to the progressive Shia Ismaili community and is an ardent follower of the Aga Khan. “Being his mureed (follower) sowed the desire in me to do philanthropy at an early age,” he said. “Philanthropy runs in our Khoja community. We are taught to work for charity right from childhood. Our fundamental philosophy is to serve people.”

Patel also attributes his philanthropic streak to former senior Congress leader Murli Deora. “When I joined the Congress 35 years ago, it was Deoraji who taught me to use this platform in a philanthropic way to serve people and to not just focus on overflowing gutters or building constructions,” he said. “It was he who taught me how best I could uplift people's lives as a politician.”

The MLA also focusses on education in his constituency by admitting students to BMC schools. “We started the J R Municipal School in Dongri eight years ago,” he said. “It has 1,020 students today and the SSC result was 88 percent last year. I am still not happy with it because I want a 95 to 98 percent result.”

The Fazlani Aishabai & Haji Abdul Latif Charitable Trust provides the support staff of 53 people for this school. “There are a total of five BMC English medium schools in Kamathipura, Dongri and Imamwada and I have started two more this year,” he said. “I have six wards and I want two English medium schools per ward with a capacity of 1,000 students.”

Patel's plans for the near future include starting a new multispecialty hospital with free chemotherapy and palliative care services for cancer patients near Grant Road station, where renowned doctors will visit twice a week to offer free OPD services. Also on the anvil is a plan to redevelop Kamathipura, largely known as a red-light area. “People raise their eyebrows when they hear the name,” he said. “My intention is to change its image completely.”

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