

Mumbai: BMC budget to focus on infrastructure and health; new taxes not likely

MUMBAI: The BMC budget outlay for 2022-2023, which will be announced on Thursday, is expected to grow around 7- 8% and cross Rs 40,000 crore while carrying a Shiv Sena imprint in its development agenda.

With the corporation earning record collections in premium from builders, no new taxes are likely to be proposed in the run-up to the municipal election, save for a nominal increase in charges for water and other services.

The budget, political observers say, will be a shadow manifesto for the Sena as the party goes to polls with a slew of new announcements, schemes and big-ticket projects.

While healthcare, infrastructure projects and education are expected to get big allocations, it will also set aside money for beautification of traffic islands and footpaths.

The budget is also likely to have announcements to woo the Sena's core vote bank of Marathi voters with the reiteration of the property tax waiver for homes below 500 sq ft.

Officials said apart from big ticket projects, the BMC will keep funds aside for Mumbai's Climate Action Plan (MCAP).

Officials said projects that are part of mitigation and adaptation towards climate change are likely to feature in the budget.

Milind Mhaske, Praja Foundation director, said the pandemic has shown the need for strengthening health infrastructure.

"The budget needs to focus on improving health infrastructure and one of the ways could be converting primary health centres into smaller nursing homes. This will automatically reduce the burden on bigger hospitals and citizens could also get faster access to healthcare. This can be taken up by public private partnership," said Mhaske.

Last year, BMC had laid out capital expenditure of Rs 18,750.99 crore and a healthcare outlay of Rs 4,728 crore. "The budget is expected to grow 7%-8% so it will cross Rs 40,000 crore. This year capital expenditure (money spent on development projects and infrastructure) will be equal to revenue expenditure (recurring expenses like salaries and establishment costs). Usually revenue expenditure is more than capital expenditure. But if they become equal it will mean that we will be able to get more work from the same manpower," said a senior civic official.

Officials said money for mega infrastructure projects like Coastal Road, Goregaon-Mulund Link Road (GMLR), desalination plant, a waste-to-energy plant and spending on roads and bridges are also set to increase.

On the downside, Worli resident Anand Bhandare who has, in the past, published almost 55 corporator report cards along with citizens across the city with the help of Right to Information Act said one of the biggest drawbacks of the budget usually is that money allocated never gets spent completely.

Link: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/mumbai-bmc-budget-to-focus-on-infrastructure-and-health-new-taxes-not-likely/articleshow/89263609.cms>