



The Authorities have announced yet another *Kayapalat* for BEST, this time to finish it off for ever.

In 2018, our forum Aamchi Mumbai Aamchi BEST objected to the proposal of redeveloping bus depots to overcome BEST's deficits. In a round-table organised by a local newspaper, the Municipal Commissioner Ajoy Mehta categorically denied this proposal, and reassured the participants:

there is no way I can allow the sale of family silver...these are public lands. Mumbai is land starved. We are not going to get land again...just because today we have fallen on bad days, [must] I sell my family silver and and sit on the street with an umbrella? This is not happening.¹

However, the government and the BMC today are in a great hurry to sell every piece of “family silver” to builders, apparently to bring BEST out of “financial crisis and make it self-reliant.” **It is quite ironic that the government and the BMC, who have systematically taken the legs out of this essential service, now claim that selling assets will help BEST “stand on its own feet.”**

The BEST's public relations office recently issued a press release announcing a land privatisation initiative called *Kayapalat Prkalp* [Transformation Scheme]. The press release and the press reports that followed provide a reasonable picture of what the authorities have in mind. The scheme involves redeveloping 22 BEST depots, and the revenue from sale of premium FSI will be utilised to pay the outstanding liabilities of the undertaking, purchase new buses, and pay the arrears of retired and working employees. The redevelopment will also provide a sustainable and long term revenue for the utility, and create a corpus fund and recurring fund. According to newspaper reports, the redevelopment will create, not only commercial real-estate, but also “social infrastructure” such as schools, hospitals, art museums, theatres, sport centres and cultural centres. Additionally, “public parking” facilities for 36,000 cars will be built. The depots will be redeveloped under the Transit Oriented Development (TOD) approach, with FSI ranging from 1.3 to 7.0.² The BEST Committee is said to have accepted this proposal.

¹ Tariq Engineer, “BEST depots no longer up for sale: BMC chief Ajoy Mehta”, Mumbai Mirror, 21st May 2018. See <https://mumbaimirror.indiatimes.com/mumbai/cover-story/lets-give-best-wings/articleshow/64250096.html>

² Somit Sen, “BEST eyes higher FSI for transit-oriented development to fund BEST revival”, Times of India, 5 August 2026. See <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/best-eyes-higher-fsi-for-transit-oriented-development-to-fund-best-revival/articleshow/132890435.cms>

Notwithstanding the grand announcement, this is not the first *Kayapalat* attempt by the authorities to make BEST 'self-reliant'. In 2015, the BMC Commissioner promised BEST *Kayapalat* by hiking fares, which instead (predictably) led to a loss of commuters. The Commissioner then attempted another *Kayapalat* by deciding to bring in private operators (wet-leasing) to "reduce losses", but BEST's accumulated deficits continued to increase, and now stands at Rs. 7,322 crore. In other words, the wet-leasing *Kayapalat* has been a fiasco. Another *Kayapalat* announcement was to make BEST a feeder service to the Metro, and for many years the BEST and BMC officials have made lofty announcements of expanding the fleet to 10,000 buses. Orders have been placed, but the buses have not arrived. And now, instead of evaluating the real reasons for the failures of the earlier *Kayapalat* schemes, the government has announced another *Kayapalat*, which involves selling "family silver" and earning money by selling FSI.

Aamchi Mumbai Aamchi BEST has frequently pointed out since 2017 that the authorities are deliberately creating a crisis in BEST and privatising the fleet in order to eventually make a case for handing over its prime depot land to Mumbai builders. For example, in our 2024 booklet "Privatization of BEST: An Unqualified Fiasco" we had pointed out:

When privatisation plans were announced in 2017, AMAB had warned that the consequences would be disastrous. We had argued that it would result in hardships for commuters and workers alike, that there would be no reduction of the so-called 'losses', that the quality of services would suffer, and that eventually the authorities might resort to extreme measures such as sale of BEST land and winding down of the service itself. All of these fears have been borne out in fact.

Privatisation of BEST and down-sizing of the workforce have opened the door to the sale of BEST's assets, particularly urban land. So far, four of the BEST's depots have been redeveloped. While we do not know how much the BEST has benefited from these redevelopments, we do know that BEST is yet to recover Rs. 300 crores from developers involved in three earlier such projects. The General Manager in 2023 admitted that such recovery would be "difficult". In 2017, the BEST had appointed Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC) to study the possibility of commercial exploitation of BEST's land. According to the report, 126 hectares of land could yield a revenue of Rs 1,800 – 2,200 crores or an 'enhanced' revenue of Rs 5,170 – 6,160 crores. In April 2023 BEST announced it would be taking aid from the World Bank arm International Finance Corporation to monetise its depots.

The government is now resorting to word play by stating that land ownership will remain with the BEST, and the depots are being leased, and that "social infrastructure" like schools, hospitals, etc. will be created on these lands. But citizens of Mumbai know that this is all an eyewash: the government is selling development rights on that land, which will allow builders to profit from real estate. No builder is going to build schools and cultural centres as charity; these facilities, if any, will be provided as a small component of the overall commercial project, and it is quite likely that they will remain unused. **It is obvious that monetisation of BEST land is not a means to rescue BEST**

from its crisis – on the contrary, the crisis in BEST has been created, and the bus system has been systematically dismantled, to prepare the ground for monetising land. The very fact of monetisation shows that the authorities have decided to finish off BEST for ever. The *kayapalat* scheme will not lead to a ‘transformation’ of BEST, but will become its cremation rites.

BEST monetisation is being undertaken despite the fact that it has not worked in the past. It is being undertaken despite the fact that the underlying revenue problems of BEST will not disappear through a sale of assets. And it is being undertaken despite the fact that it will facilitate profits from land but no benefits for the public. All of BEST’s problems originate with the unwillingness of the BMC to provide funding to BEST. However, the BMC has proved time and again that it has funds for extravagant and damaging car-centric projects, but nothing for an essential service that is a lifeline for common Mumbaikars. What is actually needed is a *kayapalat* in the mindset of the government and BMC.

We the citizens need to build a struggle-movement to achieve the following important demands to ensure an adequate public bus transport system in the city:

- 1) The wet-lease system should be scrapped immediately**
- 2) BEST should increase its fleet to at least 10,000 buses owned and maintained by the BEST.**
- 3) The BMC must ensure funding for BEST to run efficiently and clear its deficits.**
- 4) The proposal to hand over BEST land to private players must be immediately reversed.**

Aamchi Mumbai Aamchi BEST (AMAB) Joint Action Group
17 August 2026

AMAB Joint Action Group

Aamchi Mumbai Aamchi BEST, Democratic Youth Federation of India, Humanist Centre (Dahisar & Borivali), Disha Students’ Organization, Fridays for Future Mumbai, Habitat and Livelihood Welfare Association, Jan Haq Sangharsh Samiti, Janvadi Mahila Sangathan, Lokraj Sanghatana, Loktantrik Kamgar Union, CITU, All India Trade Union Congress, Students’ Federation of India, Mulbhut Adhikar Sangharsh Samiti (MASS), Nagari Niwara Vichar Manch, Naujawan Bharat Sabha, Nivrut Kamgar Sanghatana, Pudhe Chala, Purogami Mahila Sanghatana, Bhadekaru Kriti Samiti, Sarva Shramik Sanghathana, Janata Kendra, Purogami Vidyarthi Sanghatana