



German bank awards show ruffles feathers

Several NGOs are unhappy with the jury at the Deutsche Bank award function

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They were to acknowledge the project which transformed the lives of Mumbaikars. But the first Deutsche Bank Urban Age Award and Special Commendation, presented by German Chancellor Angela Merkel at Mumbai University on Thursday, had NGOs and citizens voicing unhappiness with the jury.

The waterfront developed by architect PK Das at Bandra won the award. Urban Design Research Institute (UDRI), a thinktank of which conservation architect Rekul Mehrotra is the executive director, was given special commendation for its efforts to preserve the city's glorious past.

Das shared the \$1 lakh award money with the second-placed Triratana Prerana Mandal, an NGO working to improve the lives of slum dwellers near Milan subway, Santacruz.

However, many unhappy NGOs claimed that two of the jury members — actor Shabana Azmi and Mehrotra — were “not neutral”. Azmi contributed over Rs1 crore from

the MPLAD fund for the waterfront project, while Mehrotra's UDRI was in the race. In addition, Das is the general secretary of the Azmi-run NGO, Nivara Hakk Sangharsh Samiti. “How can individuals connected with the projects be on the jury? It is universal ethics that either the project should not have applied for the award, or the jury member connected with it should have resigned,” said civic activist Shailesh Gandhi.

Sharing Gandhi's view, PB Samant, president of Nagari Nivara Hakk, an NGO known for building low-cost homes at Goregaon, said, “While I accept the jury's decision, I strongly believe that irrespective of whether the jury member votes or not, the principle is that an individual should resign if the project he or she is associated with is participating.” But Das dismissed it as “a case of sour grapes”.

Defending the awards as fair and transparent, chairperson Ricky Burdett said, “Like it happens at any award selection, jury members in many cases are connected with some or the other project. In such an event, the member does not vote for that project to avoid the conflict of interest. In this case also, Mehrotra and Azmi did not vote for the projects they were associated with.”