

Encroachments destroy 80-acre mangrove patch in Wadala: Report

NEAR MONORAIL STN Forest dept confirms violations, says they haven't got charge of MMRDA land

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MUMBAI: Five months after the Bombay high court (HC) directed state agencies to hand over mangrove areas to the forest department, officials found encroachments are destroying an 80-acre wetland and mangrove patch in Wadala that is yet to be handed over to the forest department.

The inspection team's report will be presented before the wetland and mangroves committee headed by the Konkan divisional commissioner on May 15.

On May 4, a team of forest department officials inspected a site located 500 metres from Bhakti Park monorail station, which comes under the jurisdiction of Mumbai Metropolitan Regional Development Authority (MMRDA).

The site inspection was carried out after environment group Vanashakti filed four complaints in past three months.

According to the forest department's report, which HT has a copy of, mounds of debris and mud have been dumped on mangrove vegetation and on all sides of a water body across a 1.5km stretch, from the monorail station to an old check post on Bombay Port Trust Road.

Encroachers have cut tidal water inflow in the wetland, killing mangroves.

'5,128 HA OF MANGROVES, WETLANDS BEING WIPED OUT AT URAN'

WHAT: Environment groups and members of the fishing community have filed a fresh complaint with the Maharashtra government alleging 5,128 hectares of mangroves and wetlands in Uran and Navi Mumbai are being destroyed through debris dumping and landfilling activities

WHERE: Environment groups Nature Connect, Shree Ekvira Aai Pratishtan (SEAP) and the fishermen's body Paarampaarik Machhimar Bachao Kruti Samiti claimed 2,240 hectares for the Navi Mumbai Special Economic Zone (NMSEZ), 1,250 hectares for the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust Special Economic Zone, and 1,638 hectares under the City Industrial Development Corporation Limited (Cidco) have witnessed permanent damage

RESPONSE: Neenu Somraj,

member secretary of the state mangroves committee, said a team of forest officers, including her, had surveyed areas where complaints were filed. "All I can say now is that violations have happened. We will present all cases during our next hearing on May 15," she said.

THE LAW

Destruction of mangrove forests across Maharashtra and construction within 50m of mangrove areas was banned by the Bombay high court (HC) first in 2005 after a petition by the Bombay Environment Action Group. In September, the HC bench of justice Abhay Oka and justice Riyaz Chagla passed its final order, which read, "Destruction of mangroves offended the fundamental rights of the citizens and hence it was a mandatory duty of the state and its agencies and instrumentalities to protect and preserve the mangroves."



Debris dumped at a site located 500 metres from Bhakti Park monorail station in Wadala.

PENALTY FOR DESTROYING MANGROVES

Under section 15 of the Environment Protection Act, 1986, offences punishable with jail up to five years and a fine up to ₹1 lakh

Continuing the offence can attract ₹5,000 fine per day
On continuing offence, jail term can increase to seven years or more

"A road has been built through debris dumping from the highway and slum encroachments are facilitating landfilling on mangrove areas during the night," said a forest official who was part of the inspection team.

Chief operating officer of Mumbai Monorail at MMRDA, DLN Murthy refused to comment

on the matter.

HT had first reported the violation after Vanashakti filed its first complaint in February. In January, the HC had directed state agencies like MMRDA to hand over mangrove areas to the forest department.

However, the handover is still underway. "These agencies are

purposely delaying or refusing to hand over mangrove areas to the forest department and using it as construction debris dump yards," alleged Stalin D, director of Vanashakti.

"While the land does not fall under our jurisdiction, violations of HC orders have been observed," said N Vasudevan,

additional principal chief conservator of forest (mangrove cell).

"The case will be presented before the wetland and mangroves committee headed by the Konkan divisional commissioner on May 15 and the mangrove cell will be informing the nodal officer, MMRDA to take action and restore the area."