

# 'Dindoshi Hills land in SGNP illegally handed off to developer'

Activist Stalin D has alleged trees are being felled and river courses altered for construction work

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**ENVIRONMENTALIST** Stalin D, director of the NGO Vanashakti, has levelled serious accusations against

Mumbai authorities for allegedly allowing the illegal transfer of notified forest land within the Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP). According to Stalin, encroachment and destruction within the park are escalating, with the authorities failing in their duty to protect this critical ecosystem.

Stalin claims that the Dindoshi Hills, an essential part of the park's environment, have been excluded from SGNP's boundaries and are now being targeted for development. He pointed out that two hectares of this land are being secretly handed over to a private developer, who intends to designate the area as open space in a new project.

Stalin further alleged that the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has approved township developments on the Dindoshi Hills, despite the area being the source of two vital rivers, Oshiwara and Poisar. He high-

lighted that the developer has already started excavating the hills and altering the rivers' courses, while the forest department remains indifferent to the environmental damage.

"Thousands of trees have been felled in the area, and despite two FIRs filed by the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board (MPCB) and BMC against the developer, construction plans have been greenlit. How can land with documented environmental violations be opened up for construction?" Stalin questioned.

"Repeated fires and deforestation on the Dindoshi Hills have forced us to approach the National Green Tribunal (NGT), which subsequently formed a committee to investigate. During a site inspection, the committee encountered rep-

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**2HA**  
Area of land allegedly handed to builders



Stalin alleged that BMC has approved township developments on the Dindoshi Hills

representatives of another developer claiming ownership of the land, raising further concerns about the extent of encroachment. An RTI filed by me revealed that the developer has obtained permission to construct on the Dindoshi Hills, including a shocking two hectares of notified forest land within the SGNP. The Deputy Conservator of Forests from

SGNP is accused of approving the resurvey and handover of this forest land without proper authorisation," Stalin said.

Stalin D has accused authorities of a two-fold scam, involving the illegal transfer of forest land and a potential manipulation of PSI regulations. He has sent legal notices demanding the revocation of permissions and protection

of the national park's boundaries. The environmentalist has placed the onus of this alleged illegal activity on the district collector and the deputy conservator of forests.

"The situation has escalated into a major environmental crisis, with the future of the Sanjay Gandhi National Park hanging in the balance," Stalin added.

## Conversion from notified to reserved forest lags in state

Since 2019, only 56 per cent of the forest area notified by the state govt has been converted to reserved forest



The process to convert areas notified as forest to reserved forest has been lagging in the state since 2019. REPRESENTATION PIC

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ONLY 56 per cent of the forest area notified by the state government has been converted into reserved forests since 2019. According to information obtained through an RTI from the forest department, the government has notified approximately 1.18 lakh hectares as forest land across 11 circles in the state from January 1, 2019, to July 24, 2024. However, only 67,000 hectares—about 56 per cent of the notified area—has been officially declared as reserved forest during the same period.

The process of declaring an area as a reserved forest is governed by the Indian Forest Act of 1927, a key piece of legislation designed to protect and regulate forest resources. The procedure begins with a notification under Section 4, which initiates an inquiry into rights and claims over the land. The final declaration under Section 20 formally establishes the area as a reserved forest, subjecting it to stringent protection measures.

However, the latest data reveals a significant lag in the conversion process. Since 2022, only 8,396 hectares have been declared as reserved forests, a stark contrast to the 28,222 hectares declared in 2019 alone. This slowdown is particularly alarming in the context of growing environmental concerns.

For instance, Dhule circle has seen zero new forest area declared as reserved since 2020, while the Thane circle, despite having 7,255 hectares notified during the same period, has only 3 hectares officially recognized as reserved forest. This

**'Given the recent severe impacts of climate change and the worsening pollution levels, especially during winter, it is crucial for the government to expedite the declaration of more forest areas as reserved'**

Jeetendra Ghadge, The Young Whistleblowers Foundation

**67K**  
Hectares converted to reserved forest since 2019

delay in conversion raises questions about the government's commitment to forest conservation.

According to Jeetendra Ghadge of The Young Whistleblowers Foundation,

"Given the recent severe impacts of climate change and the worsening pollution levels, especially during winter, it is crucial for the government to expedite the declaration of more forest areas as reserved. This is particularly urgent in and around urban centres like Mumbai and Pune, which are facing deteriorating air quality and increasingly extreme hot and humid conditions."

As the effects of climate change become more pronounced, the importance of protecting and expanding forest cover cannot be overstated. The data underscores the need for swift governmental action to safeguard the state's forest resources, which are critical for maintaining ecological balance and mitigating the effects of climate change.