

We Can Never Have Enough Of Nature



PHOTOGRAPH OF THE MONTH



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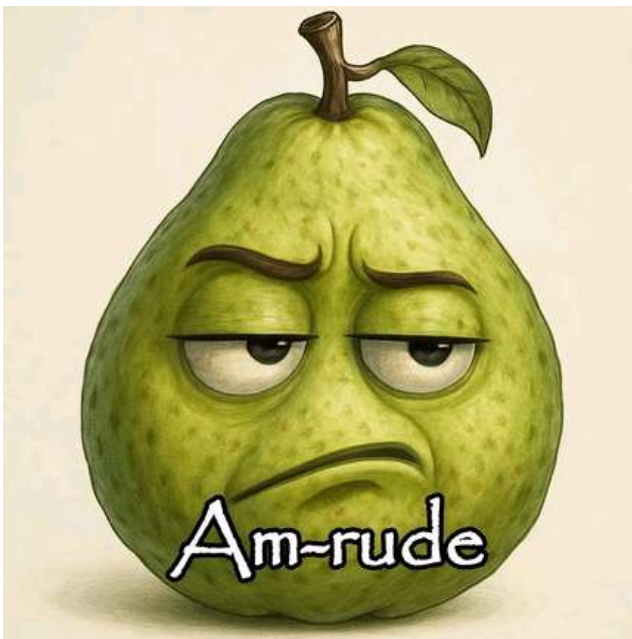
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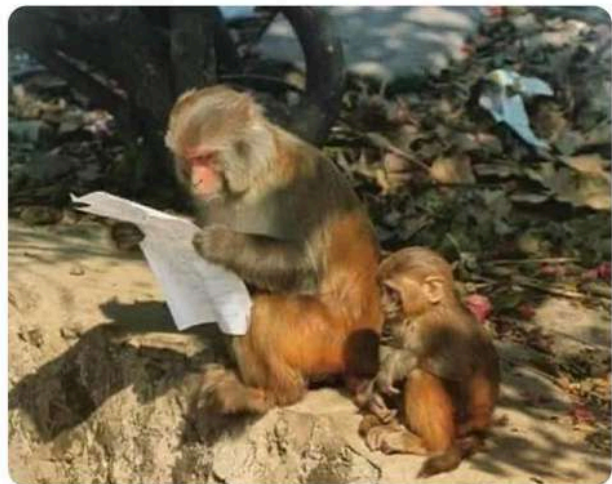
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Memes Of The Month



me looking at the F my kid got for
the math homework i solved



Survival Skills Workshop Soami Nagar Model School



A Survival Skill workshop was held at Soami Nagar Model School, through which class 7 students were taught important tools needed to survive. The students were taught how to prepare survival kits and first aid kits, how to identify fruit trees and filter water, and what to do in the event of disasters such as fires, snake-bites, earthquakes, floods, and landslides.



This workshop helped promote disaster awareness among the students and instilled a sense of responsibility and confidence.



[Watch Video](#)

Plantation Drive



Our recent weekend plantation drive at Tughlaqabad Biodiversity Park continued with great success, as 100+ native trees were planted with the help of dedicated volunteers.

This month, participants were delighted to spot a robber fly, a lynx spider, and a leaf beetle; fascinating reminders of how restoring native vegetation supports local biodiversity.

[Watch Video](#)

Fireflies Workshop



The monsoon season brought glowing fireflies to the nights of Delhi.

Our firefly workshops attracted many visitors who were eager to experience this wonder. Many were amazed to witness this natural spectacle in the city for the first time.

The twinkling lights created cherished memories, showcasing the magic of nature.

A Magical Night In Delhi With Fireflies

“I was inside a noisy park within my never asleep metropolitan city!
I did not believe my eyes, truly!
‘Cause ten million fireflies did light up my environs...”

Mudita Agarwal, moved by the fireflies workshop, penned down her thoughts.



Click the link below to read the entire blog

[Open Blog](#)

Planned Events

Fireflies Workshop



Join us at our fireflies workshop and immerse yourself in their beautiful glowing world.

If you're planning to start the month with something memorable, we've got you covered! Visit our events page for upcoming workshop dates

This experience is suitable for people of all ages, so hurry and register now!

[Book Your Spot](#)

Nature Talks Podh-cast Ep. 76



Delhi Dogs vs Human Menace

In episode 76 of Nature Talks Podh-cast, Verhaen Khanna and Shrutikriti decode the recent Delhi Dog issue.

The discussion highlights the initial court order demanding the removal of all stray dogs to shelters—a move that sparked widespread outrage and concern for animal welfare. Soon after, the court revised its stance, allowing sterilized and vaccinated dogs to return to their localities, while calling for feeding zones and a national policy on stray dog management.

Through expert insights, the episode dives into the tension between public safety and compassion for animals, the rise in rabies and bite cases, and why the Animal Birth Control (ABC) program remains the only humane, science-backed solution.

Listeners are reminded that building coexistence with animals requires empathy, strong policy, and proper implementation—not knee-jerk reactions.

Tune in to this thought-provoking conversation and learn how you too can be part of shaping a more compassionate, balanced future for Delhi's people and its animals.

[Listen on Spotify](#)

[Watch on Youtube](#)

[Watch Reel](#)

Tree Care

HOW TO SAVE FALLEN TREES

When a tree falls down for any reason like storm, pruning, construction, etc. instead of removing them, efforts should be made to restore the tree back to its original location.

HOW TO SAVE A FALLEN TREE

Standard Operating Procedures



Scan this QR code for more details

OR

Click the link below

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1yN5wKNEFmzmtCSIRZzO1shu1PAMDD/view?usp=drivefsk>

Tree Care in the Colony

Do you have trees in your society?

No
Plant Trees

Yes
Are the trees cemented?

Yes
Remove the cement around the trees

No
Are there any wires/nails/boards on the tree

Yes
Remove them

No
Pour Water around the trees and spread leaf compost around the trees

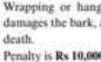
Tree Line- The tree line is the row of trees planted along roads, and boundary walls. It helps keep the colony green, cool, and full of life.

What is a gap in the tree line? A gap means a tree has fallen, dried, or been illegally removed and hasn't been replaced.

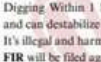
What Can You Do? Residents can plant a native tree in the empty spot, especially during monsoon. With basic care like watering and composting, the tree line can be restored and kept healthy.

Illegal Activities and Penalties

 Driving nails into trees causes internal wounds, making them vulnerable to disease, decay, and even death.
Penalty is Rs 10,000/-.

 Wrapping or hanging wires around trees constricts growth, damages the bark, and can lead to electric hazards or slow tree death.
Penalty is Rs 10,000/-.

 Fixing boards onto trees is illegal. Trees are not advertising spaces. Defacing public property is a crime.
Penalty is Rs 10,000/-.

 Digging Within 1 Metre of Trees damages roots, causes stress, and can destabilize the tree. It's illegal and harmful.
FIR will be filed against the person/department involved.

 Cementing Around Tree Base (Within 1 Metre) blocks water and air from reaching roots. It suffocates trees, prevents them from growing wider and weakens them structurally. Forest department will charge the penalty based on the damage caused.

[Open Pdf](#)

Raising Awareness

World Cloud Leopard Day



International Clouded Leopard Day is celebrated and protect one of the most elusive wild cats.

The day highlighted a vital truth — clouded leopards, with their mysterious beauty, face shrinking habitats and growing threats. It called for global awareness and urgent conservation efforts to ensure these rare cats continue to thrive in our forests.

World Cat Day



International Cat Day, , is a celebration of one of the world's most beloved animals.

The day reminded us of a simple truth — cats are not just companions but also vital to our ecosystems. It highlighted the need to love, protect, and care for them, whether in our homes or in the wild

World Lion Day

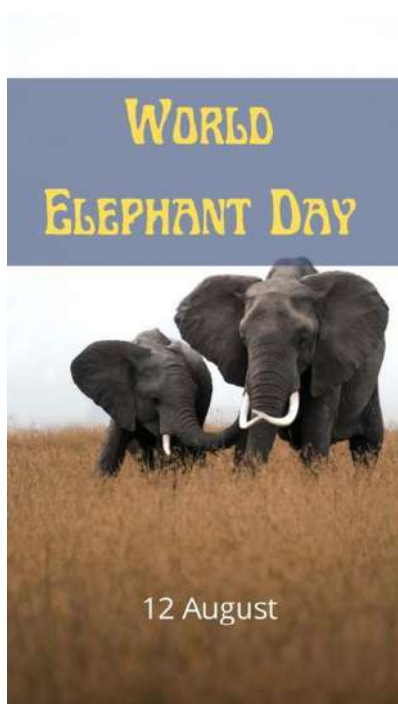


International Lion Day reminded us of a pressing reality — the King of the Jungle is under threat.

With shrinking habitats and rising human pressures, this day called for urgent action to protect lions and ensure they continue to roam free for generations to come.

Raising Awareness

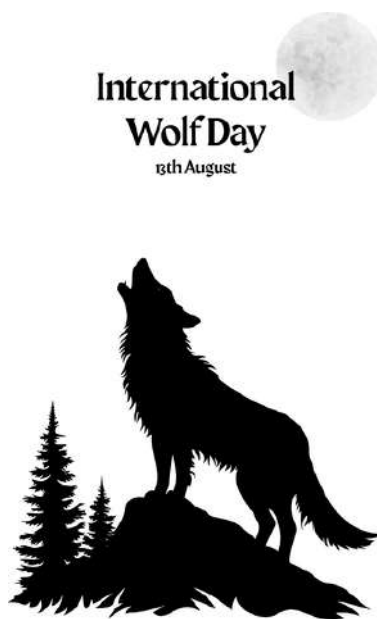
World Elephant Day



World Elephant Day, , is a reminder of the gentle giants that walk our Earth.

The day highlighted a crucial truth — elephants face threats from poaching, habitat loss, and human conflict. It called for collective action to protect these majestic beings and ensure they continue to thrive in the wild for generations to come.

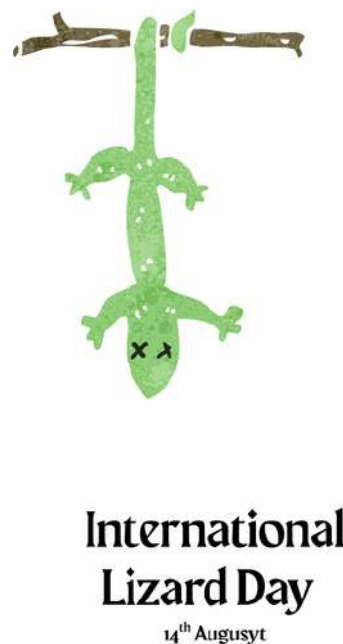
World Wolf Day



International Wolf Day, shines a light on the guardians of the wild.

The day reminded us of an important truth — wolves play a vital role in maintaining ecological balance, yet face threats from habitat loss and human conflict. It called for awareness, respect, and conservation to ensure their haunting howls continue to echo in our forests.

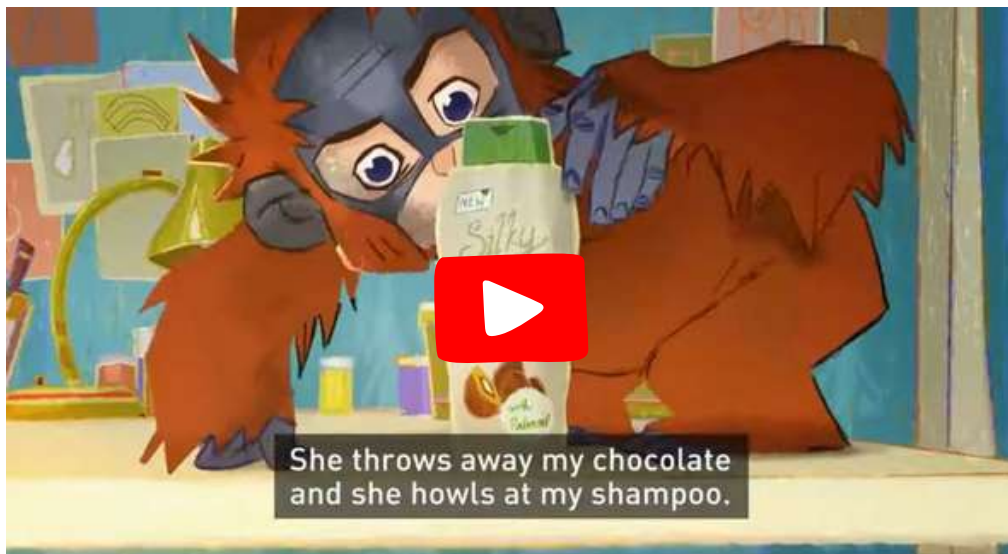
World Lizard Day



World Lizard Day, celebrates these often-overlooked reptiles that play a key role in our ecosystems.

The day highlighted a simple truth — lizards help control pests and maintain balance in nature, yet they face threats from habitat destruction and climate change. It called for greater awareness and appreciation to ensure these small but vital creatures continue to thrive.

World Orangutan Day



On World Orangutan Day, we are reminded of the urgent need to protect one of our closest relatives in the animal kingdom.

Orangutans are critically endangered due to deforestation, habitat loss, and illegal wildlife trade.

This day calls on us to reflect on our responsibility toward conserving forests, promoting sustainable choices, and safeguarding biodiversity.

Protecting orangutans means protecting the ecosystems we all depend on.

[Watch Video](#)

Meteor Shower



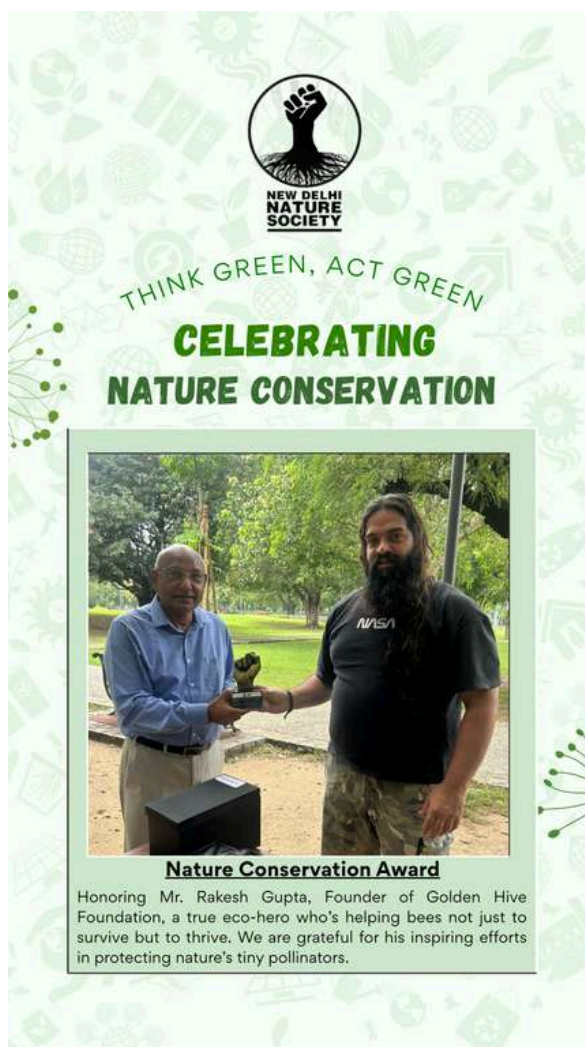
The Perseid Meteor Shower, one of the year's most stunning celestial events, was visible from July 17 to August 24, peaking on August 12–14.

Caused by Earth passing through the debris of Comet Swift-Tuttle, the meteors appeared to radiate from the constellation Perseus.

Normally offering up to 100 meteors per hour, this year's show was dimmed by a bright waning gibbous Moon, reducing visibility to about 10–20 meteors per hour.

A highlight was the rare Venus–Jupiter conjunction, adding extra brilliance to the night sky and reminding us of the universe's timeless wonders.

Nature Conservation Award



Honoring Efforts to Save Bees

We are delighted to celebrate Mr. Rakesh Gupta, founder of the “Golden Hive Foundation”, as the recipient of the Nature Conservation Award for his remarkable contributions to bee conservation.

His tireless efforts in protecting pollinators, raising awareness, and promoting sustainable practices are an inspiration to all.

Bees play a vital role in maintaining biodiversity and ensuring food security, and changemakers like Mr. Gupta remind us how individual commitment can create collective impact.

Help Trees & Animals



The Hon'ble National Green Tribunal (NGT), Principal Bench, New Delhi in O.A. No. 62 of 2013 Aditya, N. Prasad & Ors. v Union of India & Ors. vide its Order dated 23.04.2013 directed.

"In the meanwhile, we direct all the public authorities, more particularly Municipal Corporation of Delhi, DDAs, DTC, DMRC, NHAI and all Government respondents in this petition including the Director General of CPWD, the Chief Engineer, FWD, to ensure that:

1. All the sign boards, names, advertisements, any kind of boards or signages, electric wires and high tension cables or otherwise are removed from the trees forthwith.
2. They shall also ensure that the concrete surrounding the trees within one metre of the trees are removed forthwith and all the trees are looked after well and due precaution is taken in future so that no concrete or construction or repaving work is done at least within one metre radius of the trunk of trees. The Vice-Chairperson, the Commissioner, the Chief Engineer, the Director General and all other senior most officers of the Departments/authorities concerned shall be personally responsible for carrying out this order.
3. The Departments/authorities concerned shall take all and every prohibitive measures to prevent the defolting of the trees in any manner whatsoever, save only its trimming in accordance with law.
4. All the respondents whose boards are fixed on the trees shall be prosecuted by the respective authorities under in accordance with the relevant law."



Nails on trees



Wires on trees



Signboards on trees



Cementing within 1 meter of trees



Digging within 1 meter of trees

Green Helpline : 011-23378513

TREE CARE

1. Remove cement around the tree, soil space around the tree should not be less than 1 meter on all sides.
2. Remove nails, wires and signboards from trees.
3. In case of holes in the tree caused by nails, you can put wet soil in the injured parts of the tree.
4. Ensure no digging or construction is done within 1 meter of trees.
5. Give water to trees daily.
6. In the forest, trees shed their leaves on the soil floor, those leaves mix with the soil and turn into nutrition for the tree roots to absorb. But around the city streets, all the fallen leaves are swept away, so the trees are not receiving that important nutrition from the fallen leaves. This is why it is extremely important to put leaf compost around trees, to make the trees strong and healthy.
7. If you see a tree cut, or with nails, wires, signboards on it or if the tree is cemented within 1 meter, then please call the Green Helpline and report the issue with the exact location, then they will send you the complaint number by SMS for you to follow up.

HOW TO SAVE FALLEN TREES



HOW TO CONDUCT A TREE CENSUS :

1. Number on the Tree :
2. Common name of the tree :
3. Location of the tree :
4. Girth (in cms) :
5. Approximate height (in ft) :
6. Health of the tree :
(D-Dry, H-Healthy, I-Infected, L-Lopped, NI-Nails, Ch-Tree guard chocking)
7. Width of open soil around the tree :
(A- Up to 1 ft, B- 1 to 2 ft, C- 2 ftft, D-4ft, E- Over 5ft)
8. Ground condition, outside the open soil :
(S- loose soil, C- cemented, M-metalized, T-filled)
9. Remark:

Download the form :



We're offering free reflective collars for street animals and tree care brochures to spread awareness and safety.

You can collect them from the NDNS headquarters, so simply contact us at newdelhinaturesociety@gmail.com

Let's work together to protect our animals and nurture our trees.

[Email us](#)

Important Articles

{ FARIDABAD } COMPLAINT FILED WITH FOREST DEPT

Trees 'felled' in Aravalli tract

Jayashree Nandi

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FARIDABAD: Environmental activists have flagged large-scale felling of trees and clearing of vegetation in Sarai Khwaja village in Faridabad's Aravallis, an area declared a "deemed forest" by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) in March 2019.

In a complaint to the divisional forest officer (DFO), Faridabad Forest Division, on Saturday, Lt Col Sarvadam Singh Oberoi (retd), the original petitioner before the NGT, alleged that "a concerted effort is underway to clear the area of all trees and regeneration in an apparent effort to frustrate the NGT's orders and violate the status quo situation." He added, "This cutting of trees of all sizes is amply visible in the attached photos with the time, date and GPS location (Lat. Long.) stamp of today, Saturday, 30.08.2025."

Oberoi has submitted photos and videos of the felling to the forest department. He pointed to the timing of the activity, saying, "The timing of this activity is particularly suspect, as it comes



A photo shared by an environmentalist on alleged damage. HT

just after a week or two of the notification of the definition of forest as per the dictionary meaning by the Govt of Haryana, which has fixed a minimum threshold of forest cover for the same. It is submitted that this clearing is an attempt to create new facts on the ground and subvert the orders of the hon'ble NGT and the hon'ble SC regarding deemed forests."

According to the DFO, nearly an acre of shrubs had been cleared. On August 18, Haryana issued a notification defining

"forest as per dictionary meaning" with restrictive technical criteria, a move environmental activists have warned could strip most of the state's remaining Aravalli tracts of legal protection. The definition requires a minimum canopy density of 40% and coverage of at least five hectares if isolated, or two hectares if contiguous with government-notified forests. It excludes all linear, compact agroforestry plantations and orchards outside notified forests.

Surender Dhang, DFO Faridabad, said the department had acted on the complaint. "We got the complaint and immediately rushed a team to the spot. The clearing of vegetation has been stopped," he said. It was not immediately clear on whose behest the clearing was done.

HT had reported on March 9, 2019, that the NGT held a 52-acre plot in Sarai Khwaja village to be a "deemed forest", a ruling with potential implications for real estate projects across the Aravallis. The case arose after Haryana permitted the felling of over 7,000 trees in 2017, including mesquite and axle wood (dhau), for a group housing project by Bharti Land Limited. The tribunal rejected the state's contention that the land was not a forest because it was not recorded as such in revenue records, calling the interpretation "an erroneous understanding of law."

Three months later, Haryana government moved the Supreme Court, calling NGT's order "erroneous in law" and seeking to quash it. According to Oberoi and other activists defending the NGT order, the case has had only one hearing so far.

File Aravalli report or face contempt: SC to panel

Abraham Thomas

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NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Tuesday said that uncontrolled mining in the Aravalli range poses a grave threat to the country's ecology as it directed a committee headed by the Union environment secretary to finalise its report on Aravalli hills within two months, failing which contempt proceedings will be initiated.

The court's stern warning came after the Centre failed to meet repeated deadlines set by the top court to submit a report on formulating a uniform definition for Aravalli hills applicable across Rajasthan, Haryana, Delhi and Gujarat.

Senior advocate K Parmeshwar, who is assisting the court as amicus curiae, had suggested formation of the committee while pointing out that the lack of a uniform definition impeded efforts to curb illegal mining in Aravalli range. He had pointed out that Rajasthan prohibits mining on isolated hills up to a height of 100 metres, while Haryana does not have any definition in place. Without a definition, he said that the state was making hollow claims of denying any illegal mining.

The committee, also comprising the forest department secretaries of the four states besides other experts, was formed by the court on May 9, 2024. The court had set a deadline of two months



SC raised concerns over uncontrolled mining in the Aravalli range. HT ARCHIVE

for the committee to finish the report. On May 27 this year, the court granted an extension for final submission of the report. After expiry of this deadline, the central government on August 5

filed an affidavit requesting for a further extension of two months.

A bench headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Bhushan R Gavai said, "We could have taken a serious view of the matter. We are not interested in castigating officers, but protecting the Aravalli hills and range."

As a last opportunity, the court extended the time for the committee to submit its report latest by October 15.

It said, "If by that date, the report and the recommendations are not filed, we will be constrained to take contempt action against the members of the committee."

Reminding the Centre of the urgency that this exercise should

have required, the bench, also comprising justices K Vinod Chandran and NV Anjaria said, "Aravalli hills act as a protection against the dry winds from the north. Uncontrolled mining activity will cause a grave threat to the ecology of the nation."

The Aravalli range serves as a crucial climate barrier, blocking eastward winds from the Thar desert and preventing Delhi from experiencing dry, arid conditions.

The Supreme Court had banned mining activities across the entire Aravalli region in Haryana and Rajasthan in 2002 after Central Empowered Committee reports indicated that illegal mining had consumed 25% of the range.

Important Articles

Green Clearances Stuck As Authorities Remain Defunct

Builder Waiting For Clearance Since Feb 2024 Moves NGT

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: The dissolution of the State Level Environment Impact Assessment Authority (SEIAA) and the State Level Expert Appraisal Committee (SEAC) has led to delays in issuing environmental clearances, a builder informed the National Green Tribunal (NGT) on July 31.

In an affidavit submitted to NGT, Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) stated that environmental clearances cannot currently be issued by the state as the two authorities remain defunct. In the absence of the state bodies, the Union environment ministry is granting clearances.

NGT is considering a plea by a builder who approached the tribunal in May after app-

The plea stated that the tenure of SEIAA and SEAC ended in Sept 2024 before the EC process could be completed. The builder was seeking permission for a group housing project in Kirti Nagar

lying for environmental clearance (EC) in Feb last year. The plea highlighted that the tenure of SEIAA and SEAC ended in Sept 2024 before the EC process could be completed. The builder was seeking permission for a group housing project in Kirti Nagar.

In its reply dated July 31, the DPCC stated, "The tenure of the two bodies came to an end on Sep 5, 2024. No further notification has been issued till date by the Union govt. Af-

ter Sept 5, the matters relating to consideration of applications for EC, which ordinarily would fall within the jurisdiction of these authorities in Delhi, are being dealt by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)."

Before their terms ended, DPCC provided financial and logistic support to the two bodies. Formed in 2021 through a notification by the Union environment ministry, SEIAA and SEAC were responsible for reviewing all construction projects requiring an EC under the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) notification of 2006. These projects included large apartment complexes, hotels, commercial developments and infrastructure works exceeding a certain built-up area.

Former members of the dissolved bodies mentioned that while MoEFCC or Delhi government can initiate the reconstitution process, there has been no progress since their terms ended. "Often, there is a lot of back and forth before EC is granted. With the Centre overseeing the process, the process may take longer," said a former member, requesting anonymity.

State Level Expert Appraisal Committee, comprising three members, was headed by a former Public Works Department chief. Delhi's former environment special secretary and a functionary appointed by the previous Aam Aadmi Party govt. SEIAA had 11 members and was chaired by a former Delhi Development Authority commissioner.

City projects await green nod amid panel vacuum

Jasjeev Gandhiok

htreporters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: State Level Environment Impact Assessment Authority (SEIAA) and State Level Expert Appraisal Committee (SEAC), the two bodies that provide environmental clearances in Delhi, are yet to be reconstituted nearly a year after their tenure ended, leading to delays in project approvals, a builder informed the National Green Tribunal (NGT).

In an affidavit filed with the NGT on July 31, the Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) acknowledged that Delhi is currently unable to issue environmental clearances as both authorities remain defunct. In the interim, the Union environment ministry will handle such applications, it said.

The matter came to light on a plea filed by builder TARC Projects Ltd in May, which alleged that although it had submitted an application for environmental clearance in February 2024, the matter remained pending due to the lapse in tenure of the two bodies last year. The firm is seeking approval for a group housing project in Kirti Nagar.

In its reply, the DPCC said, "The tenure (of the two bodies) came to an end on September 5, 2024. No further notification has been issued yet to date by the Government of India. That after September 5, the matters relating to consideration of applications for EC, which ordinarily would fall within the jurisdiction of these authorities in Delhi, are being dealt with by the ministry of environment, forest and climate change (MoEFCC)."

Before their dissolution, the DPCC was providing logistical and financial support to SEIAA and SEAC, both constituted in 2021 through a notification by the MoEFCC. The two panels were responsible for scrutinising proposals under the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification, 2006, including housing, commercial, hotel, and infrastructure projects exceeding 20,000 sq m in built-up area and area development projects above 150,000 sq m.

Former members said that both the Delhi government and the Centre are empowered to reconstitute the bodies, but no steps have been taken. "Often, there is a lot of back and forth before EC is granted. With the Centre overseeing, the process may take longer," said a former member, requesting anonymity.

Important Articles

NGT seeks response on sewage plant in South-Central Ridge

Jasjeev Gandhiok

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NEW DELHI: The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has given the Delhi Jal Board (DJB), Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) and Delhi Development Authority (DDA) four weeks to explain how a decentralised sewage treatment plant (DSTP) was allowed to be built at Smriti Van in Vasant Kunj, in a part of the South-Central Ridge.

The directive follows a DPCC submission earlier this week that it had issued a show cause notice of ₹10 lakh to DJB for failing to maintain the DSTP, leading to contamination of the Macchli Talab water body.

"The applicant also submits that it has been set up inside the ridge area," a bench headed by NGT chairperson justice Prakash Shrivastava observed in its August 6 order. The bench questioned, "The question arises as to how the Consent To Establish (CTE) for setting up a DSTP in a park or ridge area has been given. DJB is permitted to place on record its application for a

grant of CTE to ascertain if it was disclosed in the application that DSTP was proposed in the park."

The tribunal noted that the DJB had received its CTE for the DSTP from the DPCC earlier this year.

According to DPCC's August 4 report, a fresh inspection of Macchli Talab showed the pond's water quality parameters failed to meet permissible standards. The total suspended solids (TSS) were at 27mg/l against the standard of 10mg/l or less; biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) at 18mg/l against 10mg/l or less; chemical oxygen demand (COD) at 52mg/l against 50mg/l or less; and ammonical nitrogen at 5.45mg/l against 5mg/l or less.

DPCC stated it issued a show cause notice to DJB under the "Polluter Pays" principle. "Now therefore, in view of the above and various orders passed by the NGT regarding the imposition or levying of environmental compensation, the Delhi Jal Board, is hereby called upon to show cause as to why compensation of ₹10 lakh should not be imposed," the report noted.

SC panel nod to set up NDRF headquarters in ecologically sensitive zone

EXPRESSNEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 27

THE SUPREME Court-enabled Central Empowered Committee (CEC) has given a nod to the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) for setting up its headquarters in South Delhi's Vasant Vihar falling under the Morphological Ridge, an ecologically sensitive zone.

The NDRF had sought the apex court's permission to get approval for construction activities in the area. A total area of 1.673 acres of land has been allotted to the Ministry of Home Affairs for setting up the headquarters and a budget of Rs 92.64 crore has also been approved.

According to a CEC report dated August 25, the site was inspected on August 5. Based on the documents and site observations, the committee found that "not all 37 trees standing on the site require removal or transplantation. Specifically, 12 trees (which have been numbered) need not be disturbed."

Among the remaining trees, it added, 15 will be transplanted within the construction site, and 10 will be felled. The land where compensatory plantation needs to take place has been identified at Ghumanhera village.

"Considering the national importance of the project...", it may be recommended for approval, the committee underlined.

"The project site has a periphery of approximately 400 meters. A green belt shall be developed along the entire periphery with a double-row plantation of about 250 indigenous tree species... Additionally, another 50 indigenous trees shall be planted along the internal roads proposed to be constructed," read one of the conditions set up by the Committee.

Important Articles

{ 'NO MORE DELAYS' }

SC tells Centre to set up single window for Ridge diversion nod in two months

Abraham Thomas

htreporters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Wednesday underlined the need to have a single window clearance for diversion of ridge land in Delhi, directing the Centre to come up with a concrete proposal to create a uniform authority within two months.

The court directed the Union government to consult all stakeholders—including the Delhi government and the Central Empowered Committee (CEC), the expert body assisting the court on environmental matters—and submit the proposal by October 8. "No time beyond two months will be granted," the bench said.

The order was passed by a bench headed by Chief Justice of

India Bhushan R Gavai, while hearing a matter related to the protection of Delhi Ridge, based on a 2023 report by the CEC highlighting the depletion of ridge land owing to encroachments and a rise in diversion of land for non forestry purposes.

"In the matter concerning the Delhi Ridge, several authorities are monitoring the issue. Authorities have to go to these committees for permission on diversion of ridge land. This leads to conflicting decisions being passed," the bench, also comprising justices K Vinod Chandran and NV Anjaria, noted.

Proposing a streamlined mechanism, the bench said, "Let the ministry of environment, forests and climate change come out with a common mechanism by con-

sulting all stakeholders."

Senior advocate K Parmeshwar, appearing as amicus curiae, reminded the court of its earlier observation in May 2024, calling the state of Delhi Ridge "very shocking". He pointed out that notifications issued on May 24, 1994, and March 19, 1996, demarcated the total ridge area as 7,784 hectares. Yet, only 103.48 hectares have been notified as ridge land.

He also informed the court that the Delhi high court, in separate matters, has constituted ad hoc committees to consider permissions for ridge land diversion, further contributing to the overlapping and fragmented oversight.

In its order, the SC said: "We direct the MoEFCC to take on board the Government of the National Capital Territory of

Delhi, the CEC, and all committees appointed by this court and the Delhi high court, and come out with a proposal wherein one uniform body can be entrusted with the work of monitoring the issue."

Additional solicitor general Aishwarya Bhati, appearing for the Centre, agreed to adhere to the timeline. The bench directed all stakeholders to cooperate and emphasised: "We make it clear that no further time will be granted to MoEFCC for submitting the proposal."

The court was hearing the TN Godavarman matter on protection of forests and wildlife across the country. The matter related to the Delhi Ridge arose separately in a petition filed in the MC Mehta case and was later transferred to the bench led by the CJI.

Protection order for Southern Ridge without verification: Govt

Jasjeev Gandhiok

jasjeev.gandhiok@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: The Delhi government will now issue a final notification granting complete protection to the Southern Ridge without conducting the previously planned ground verification, the state forest and wildlife department has informed in an affidavit to the National Green Tribunal.

The change in stance comes a week after the department had said that it will carry out the verification across 12 south Delhi villages in the next six months.

The timeline for the notification will be shared with NGT, the department added in the affidavit dated July 31.

The issue has been a long-pending one. During a hearing on July 25, the amicus curiae in the case argued that it has been four years since the NGT sought notification of the southern Ridge. On a plea filed by activist Sonya Ghosh, the NGT, in January 2021 directed the Delhi government to ensure that the notification under Section 20 of the Indian Forest Act, 1927 is issued within three months. Ghosh in 2024 filed an executive application, seeking

compliance with the 2021 order.

Delhi's Ridge areas have already been notified under Section 4 of the Indian Forest Act. However, the final notification under Section 20 is yet to be completed, which grants complete protection and defines the boundaries.

On July 23, the forest department had said it plans to carry out on-ground verification of 3,287 hectares of land across 12 villages in south Delhi by January next year before the issuance of the final notification.

The matter will now be heard on August 7.

Important Articles

53% of Delhi's southern Ridge to get protected status in 60 days

Jasjeev Gandhiok

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NEW DELHI: The Capital's forest and wildlife department will issue the final notification under Section 20 of the Indian Forest Act to protect 3,300 hectares – nearly 53% – of the total southern Ridge area within the next two months, the department has told the National Green Tribunal (NGT).

This move, pending since 1996 when the Ridge was first demarcated, will grant complete legal protection, define boundaries and prevent future encroachments. Until now, only 96.16 hectares of the 6,200-hectare southern Ridge has been notified under this section.

NGT was hearing a plea filed by activist Sonya Ghosh seeking notification of Ridge areas in Delhi.

NGT in 2021 had asked the forest department to complete notification within three months. But by 2024, no progress had been made in this respect, prompting Ghosh to file another plea.

In the latest submission dated August 21, the forest department said it will notify the southern Ridge in three phases, with Phase I to be notified first, within the next two months.

"The final notification under Section 20 of IFA in respect of Chattarpur and Rangpuri villages (Phase I) covering 96.16 hectares was issued in January 2022

in compliance with the NGT judgment dated January 15, 2021. The draft notification for the remaining 3,287.06 hectares of Phase I was submitted to the Delhi government on April 3, 2025," said the submission.

"The department is now in the process of completing all formalities for issuance of the final Section 20 notification for Phase I, limited to encumbrance-free land under its possession, which shall be completed within the next two months," the submission added, seeking a time of two months from the tribunal for the same.

In 1996, only the initial notification under Section 4 of IFA was carried out.

However, only the final noti-

cation under Section 20 grants full protection to the Ridge.

Under Phase 2, the department plans to notify more than 1,500 hectares of additional land which are free of encroachments but are tied up in court cases.

In the third phase, the remaining forest land will be taken up.

On July 23, the forest department had said it would carry out on-ground verification of 3,287 hectares of land across 12 villages in south Delhi by January next year before issuing the final notification.

However, on July 31, the department told NGT that it would skip on-ground verification and proceed directly with the final notification.

Notification of Southern Ridge sans fresh ground verification

Priyangi Agarwal [@timesofindia.com](mailto:priyangi.agarwal@timesofindia.com)

New Delhi: A week after announcing a six-month on-ground verification plan for 12 south Delhi villages before finalising the Southern Ridge notification, Delhi govt has reversed its position. The forest department has now informed the National Green Tribunal that it will proceed directly with the notification, abandoning the verification process for these villages. The amicus in the case previously highlighted that govt had sufficient time, noting that more than four years elapsed since NGT requested the Southern Ridge notification.

TOI had reported that the final notification under Section 20 for the full protection of the Ridge has been pending for 31 years now. The initial notification under Section 4 of the Indian Forest Act was issued in 1994, declaring it as a reserved forest. However, the Section 4 notification should be followed by notification under Section 20 of the Indian Forest Act which is yet to be done.

Based on a plea filed by activist Sonya Ghosh, NGT, in an order dated Jan 15, 2021, directed Delhi govt through the chief secretary to ensure the Section 20 notification within three months in respect of the area where there is no controversy. However, Ghosh filed an executive application in 2024 seeking compliance with the NGT's 2021 order.

The forest department earlier told NGT that it would conduct the final Section 20 notification of the Southern Ridge, spread over 6,200 hectares, in three phases. The tribunal on July 4 observed that though substantial time has elapsed,

The forest department earlier told NGT that it would conduct the final Section 20 notification of the Southern Ridge, spread over 6,200 hectares, in three phases

sed, the notification even in respect of Phase I has not been issued.

In a report dated July 23, the principal chief conservator of forests (PCCF) told NGT that a ground verification of 3,287 hectares, spread over 12 villages, will be done by Jan next year as part of Phase I. After the ground verification is carried out to ensure that these villages are encumbrance-free, the final notification under Section 20 of the Indian Forest Act will be issued for these 12 villages, the PCCF's report said.

Objecting to the report of PCCF, the amicus told NGT in a hearing dated July 25 that issuing the notification under Section 20 in the three months' time given by the tribunal in the Jan 2021 order for areas where there is no controversy (Phase I) has elapsed.

However, in the hearing taking place on July 31, the bench headed by Justice Prakash Shrivastava observed, "Learned Counsel appearing for Delhi govt and PCCF has submitted that a decision has been taken that no ground verification will be done for issuing the final notification under Section 20 in respect of Phase I."

Govt sought time to submit a fresh timeline for issuing the final notification in respect of Phase I. The matter will be heard on Aug 7.

Important Articles

Pruning Dilemma: Fear Is At The Root Of It

Civic Agencies Tread With Caution, Struggle To Balance Court Orders And Public Safety

Kashyap, Divit

@timesofnature

NEW DELHI: Running low on manpower, the civic authorities have long held back on pruning trees, partly out of fear of violating court orders. The fallout is now visible on the streets — falling branches and uprooted trees have claimed lives, prompting Delhi High Court to direct the Municipal Corporation of Delhi and the Public Works Department to carry out surveys to identify trees that require urgent pruning.

Worries about the legal status of pruning, however, persists. The tussle began in May 2023, when the high court heard petitions about over-pruning and misuse of the 2019 guidelines that allowed civic bodies to prune branches with girths up to 15.7cm without prior approval.

Justice Nagesh Wasthi questioned the "scientific basis" of such a figure, calling it mere "guesstimate". The court struck down the 2019 norms.

Three months later in Aug, the court directed that no felling of trees would be permitted until further orders and without its permission. Tree officers, chary about being in contempt of court, even stopped granting permissions for pruning. In Dec 2024, the court imposed another temporary ban, this time on pruning, stalling over routine trimming.

It was only in May this year that Delhi's forest department notified a new standard operating procedure, which, ironically, reiterated the 15.7cm provision and allowed such branches to be cut back without requiring permission. Anything beyond that needed to be approved by a tree officer — Delhi has only four of them.

"Even now, many officials refuse permission for pruning out of extreme caution despite the SOP being clear about public safety-led pruning," said a forest official.

"Yes, there is a staff shortage and a big backlog, but in several cases, pruning is denied by the civic departments

Old pruning rules allowed pruning up to 15.7cm girth without permission

Petition in Delhi High Court claimed misuse, tree cutting or over-pruning

MAY 2023

■ HC questions scientific basis of 15.7cm

■ Orders no pruning of trees will be permitted in Delhi except in accordance with DPTA

■ DPTA requires a tree officer to examine tree before allowing pruning/felling — Says Delhi govt is open to frame new guidelines

DEC 2024

■ Citywide halt on pruning until a compliant SOP is issued

MAY 2025

■ Forest department releases new pruning SOP, which allows light pruning without permission — up to 15.7cm girth

NEW RULES

■ No permission required to prune up to 15.7cm girth

■ For branches above 15.7cm girth, permission from tree officer needed

■ Tree officer to inspect the tree to ensure if it needs pruning

■ No permission required to prune trees up to any girth if it poses danger to safety

■ Pruning must happen under supervision of a senior horticulturist and forest dept must be informed

WHY IS PRUNING NEEDED?

■ Overgrown vegetation poses risks, people killed in mishaps

■ At least two people died this year under direct impact

■ Over 300 trees fell or damaged this year since six major thunderstorms struck the city since May

■ Many heavy trees fell in areas with low speed winds as well

■ Tree canopy blocks sunlight, streetslights, keep roads dark at night

■ Challenges faced:

■ Only four tree officers

■ In the city, low staff strength

■ Long-pending permissions

■ MCD ground staff often refuse pruning hearing action

■ Ground staff unaware of new SOP

■ Timely pruning not done

■ Lack of study on tree species and suitable area

■ Absence of trained expert or arborists

■ Lack of tree ambulance

■ Miscommunication between different departments

■ Techniques and equipment to cut branches to ensure no cantilevering or instability

■ NDMC did send personnel abroad to learn these methods some years ago, but I haven't seen much evidence of the processes being applied here."

With storms having knocked down more than 300 trees in the city this year,

TWO YEARS LATER, IT'S A JUNGLE AS DEADLOCK CONTINUES

Photo: Piyal Bhattacharya



MCD'S ROLE AND ACTIONS

■ MCD has 24 sky top pruning machines and each is targeted to prune 25 trees in a day

■ MCD also has one tree ambulance in each of 12 zones

■ Pruning of trees and branches with girth less than 15.7cm height is done every day and daily report is submitted and reviewed

■ Regarding heavy pruning, MCD claims to have received hundreds of complaints this year and managed permissions for 2,546 trees from forest department

VACANT POSTS

■ Of the 12 sanctioned posts for deputy director horticulture, 10 vacant

■ Of 25 posts of assistant directors, 13 vacant. Several posts of section officers and multi unoccupied

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HC pulls up MCD, PWD for inaction over tree pruning

Shruti Kakkar

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NEW DELHI: The Delhi High Court on Wednesday expressed displeasure and pulled up the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) and Public Works Department (PWD) for delayed pruning of trees in southwest Delhi's Dwarka, causing incidents of fallen trees and damage to life and property during monsoon.

The court was acting on a plea filed by a resident of Dwarka, who highlighted the authorities' failure to adhere to the Delhi Forest Department's standard operating procedure (SOP) for tree pruning.

Notably, the SOP issued by the government on May 2 mandates agencies such as the MCD, PWD, Central Public Works Department (CPWD), Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), and Delhi Cantonment Board to carry out tree pruning.

In his plea, the resident had

AFTER A MAN'S DEATH IN KALKAJI DUE TO A TREE FALL, HC ORDERED TREE SURVEY IN 10 DAYS TO IDENTIFY PRUNING NEEDS

argued that this negligence was leading to the fall of dead branches and tree parts, resulting in damage to life and property, and obstructing the roads and footpaths.

Referring to the recent death of a 50-year-old man in south Delhi's Kalkaji due to falling of a massive tree during monsoon, a bench comprising chief justice DK Upadhyay and justice Tushar Rao Gedela directed the authorities to conduct a survey in Dwarka within 10 days and identify trees that need pruning. Further, the civic bodies are asked to complete the pruning work within four weeks.

On August 14, a Neem tree got uprooted and fell on a man and his daughter during heavy showers. The two were on a bike. While the daughter got severely injured, the man succumbed to his injuries.

"We have lost a life. What else can be more eye-opening for the MCD? Photographs filed with the PIL clearly depict that immediate attention of the authorities is called for pruning the trees and cutting dead parts. This shows that authorities, especially MCD and PWD who maintain the roads and footpaths have not been discharging their duties under the SOP," the order stated.

"It is common knowledge that during monsoons, when there are heavy rains, several incidents of falling trees causing damages to life and property are reported. The facts as discussed above warrant the authorities to act promptly and follow the SOP."

The matter would be next heard on October 29.

Important Articles

{ BY INVITATION }

Tree care is not a luxury but an urgent necessity

Bhavreen Kandhari



Last week, yet another heartbreaking and entirely preventable tragedy struck Delhi when a man and his daughter were crushed by a falling tree in Kalkaji, an incident that lays bare the ongoing systemic failure to protect both urban trees and the people who live among them. This wasn't a tragic accident caused by nature; it was the outcome of a system that has turned its back on both people and the environment. Trees don't fall overnight. They fall because we choke them, ignore their distress, and refuse to treat their health as a civic responsibility.

Over a decade ago, in 2013, the National Green Tribunal, in an order issued a clear directive: no concrete construction be permitted within one metre of a tree's trunk, and that existing concretisation around trees be removed forthwith. This order has been violated across Delhi with impunity.

A walk through any Delhi neighbourhood — Vasant Vihar, Defence Colony, CR Park, Janakpuri, or NCR cities — exhibits the same pattern. Tree roots are encased in concrete, choking under tiles, and withering without moisture or air. An audit by citizens in Vasant Vihar revealed that over 80% of street trees are still concretised. The forest department recorded 31 violations affecting over 600 trees in just that area over the past three years. Yet, despite citizen complaints, court orders, and even contempt notices, enforcement is practically non-existent. Why is it that when a tree collapses—killing citizens due to official negligence, violating court orders, choking roots with concrete, or unscientific pruning—no FIR is filed, no officer is held liable, and no one is made to answer for the loss of life?

What makes this worse is the fact that Delhi was ordered by the Hon'ble High Court in 2022 to deploy tree ambulances and set up a tree disease surgery



A 50-60-year-old neem tree in Kalkaji was uprooted and fell on commuters during heavy rainfall on August 14. SANCHIT KHANNA/HT

unit to address the very risks that led to this tragedy. Little is known about their utilisation. Pruning is carried out by untrained workers who hack off branches without understanding the biology or stability of the tree. In fact, mindless pruning or lopping often shifts a tree's weight off-balance, making it far more vulnerable to collapse during storms and heavy rains. Concrete tiles are laid around trunks for aesthetic convenience, suffocating the roots. When these trees collapse, the blame is shifted to heavy rains or the age of the tree, never to the years of abuse it endured silently. This is not just a Delhi problem. Across India's cities, we continue to treat trees as obstacles to development rather than integral parts of urban infrastructure. The result is the same: weakened, unstable trees that cannot withstand winds or storms, increasingly common in our changing climate. This monsoon alone, over 350 trees have fallen in Delhi. And every one of them was a warning sign.

We are in the middle of a climate emergency. Trees cool our cities, absorb carbon, reduce flood risk, and sustain biodiversity. A recent study showed that shaded parks in Delhi are up to 20 degrees cooler than surrounding concrete areas. Yet, we are actively reducing the resilience of our cities by neglecting tree health. We pour crores into plantation drives, yet spend nothing on

maintaining the trees we already have. Our cities desperately need trained arborists, routine tree health audits, mobile tree care units, and strict enforcement of de-concretisation norms. These are not luxuries; they are urgent necessities.

Citizens have done their part. From filing PILs to mapping trees and documenting violations, the public has raised the alarm for years. But unless authorities face legal and financial consequences for their failure, nothing will change. Accountability must go beyond lip service. Officers who ignore NGT orders and allow illegal concretisation must be prosecuted for contempt and negligence. Every tree that falls due to such a violation is not just an environmental loss; it is a civic crime. So is it fair to call it a "tragedy"? Not really, more like "violation" that must not be brushed aside as just another unfortunate incident. It should be the last straw. We cannot allow this cycle of neglect, silence, and death to continue. Trees are living beings. They are part of our community, our climate, and our collective future. The question is no longer whether we care about trees. The question is whether we care enough to hold those in power accountable for failing to protect them, and us.

Bhavreen Kandhari is an advocate for environmental rights. The views expressed are personal

Important Articles

'Number 01' tree causing 'security hindrance in VVIP route' in Parliament, to be transplanted soon

Tree located at Gaj Dwar, often used by PM

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 23

THE TRANSPLANTATION of a tree at the Gaj Dwar, one of the six gates at Parliament often used by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is expected soon after the Special Protection Group (SPG) flagged security concerns, said officials.

Marked as 'Number 01', the

Silver Trumpet tree or *Tabebuia Argentea* is known for its bright yellow flowers. It is the lone tree standing near the gate. The Delhi Forest department gave the nod to transplant it in an order dated July 30 after the SPG flagged the related risk earlier in the month.

The transplantation has not yet started and is expected to begin soon. As per sources, the work could not be taken up while the Monsoon Session of the Parliament was underway.

The tree, about seven years old, will be moved to Prerna Sthal, which houses statues of national leaders, inside the Parliament complex.



The Silver Trumpet tree

According to Forest department officials, the site was in-

spected on July 21 to check if a transplantation is necessary. The tree was found to be obstructing the VVIP route.

In its order, the Forest department noted, "...it was found that the tree is causing security hindrance in the VVIP route in Parliament House, New Delhi and the SPG also requested for transplantation for the same tree."

In an official communication on July 16, the Parliament Security Service had underlined, "As requested by the SPG, a tree near Gaj Dwar, Parliament House, is causing security hindrance in the VVIP Route which may kindly be removed at the

earliest as per procedure."

Following the request, the Central Public Works Department (CPWD) applied for permission and deposited a security amount of Rs 57,000 with the Delhi Forest department. The nod to transplant it has been granted under Section 9 of the Delhi Preservation of Trees Act, 1994. The department has said that this is the only tree approved for transplantation.

The order stated, "Transplantation of any tree apart from 'Number 01' tree by the User Agency shall constitute an offence under Delhi Preservation of Trees Act, 1994

and in case of violation of any terms and conditions, the permission issued will be withdrawn with immediate effect."

The CPWD has been asked to plant 10 native saplings — including Neem, Amaltas, Peepal and Bargad — at the site and maintain them for seven years. Each sapling will be geo-tagged, and annual progress reports will have to be filed. If the plantation fails, the Forest Department will raise the missing saplings from the security deposit.

A senior forest official told *The Indian Express*, "It is a normal procedure. All the rules need to be followed by the agencies."

BILL IN LOK SABHA MONDAY

Jan Vishwas 2.0: Improvement notice concept for first offence

HARIKISHAN SHARMA
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 16

THE CENTRE is set to introduce the Jan Vishwas Bill (Amendment of Provisions) Bill, 2025 in Lok Sabha Monday, which among dozens of changes in various laws will have a new concept of "improvement notice" instead of penalty for first offence, *The Indian Express* has learnt.

The Bill, cleared by the Union Cabinet earlier this week, is aimed at amending certain enactments for decriminalising and rationalising offences to enhance trust-based governance for ease of living and doing business.

In her Budget speech on February 1, 2025, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said, "Our government will now bring the Jan Vishwas Bill 2.0 to decriminalise more than 100

provisions in various laws."

In the proposed Bill, it is learnt that a new provision has been added to define the "improvement notice" and to make it applicable to multiple sections. This marks a shift from the "penalise on first detection" approach of Jan Vishwas 1.0 (enacted into law in 2023) to an "inform-correct-penalise" model in Jan Vishwas 2.0 (the 2025 Bill) and aligns with the government's objective of promoting ease of doing business and trust-based regulation, while maintaining deterrence for repeated violations, said a source.

As per the proposed amendments, no penalty will be imposed for first offence and an improvement notice will be served instead, giving an opportunity to rectify the non-compliance within a stipulated period, it is learnt. Penalties apply from second offence onwards, and the

amount will be the same as it was for first offence in Jan Vishwas 1.0. Fines will increase for subsequent offences, subject to a maximum cap depending on the Sections.

This structure retains full decriminalisation while adding a formal improvement notice mechanism to encourage voluntary compliance before financial sanctions are applied, thereby reducing fear of punitive action for minor, unintentional mistakes, said a source.

In his Independence Day speech Friday, PM Narendra Modi said, "In our country, there are such laws that can put people in jail for very small things — you would be shocked. No one has really paid attention to them. I have been pursuing this, because these unnecessary laws that put our country's citizens behind bars should be abolished. We had introduced a Bill in Parliament ear-

lier, and we have brought it again this time."

Earlier the government had enacted the Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Act, 2023, to decriminalise several offences under various laws. For instance, Section 41 of the Food Corporations Act, 1964 was omitted by the Act. As per the original provisions of Section 41, the use of FCI's name in any prospectus or advertisement without its consent in writing, was punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to six months, or with fine which may go up to ₹1,000, or both.

However, it was removed by the Jan Vishwas Act. Similarly, the provision of imprisonment up to 6 months was removed from the Section 33 of the Indian Forest Act, 1927 for tree felling or damage caused by cattle in protected forests, and ₹500 fine was kept.



Important Articles

Study shows how fireflies mark a forest's health, why darkness matters

PAGE 1
ANCHOR

ARUN JANARDHANAN
CHENNAI, AUGUST 30

ON HUMID summer nights in Tamil Nadu's Anamalai Tiger Reserve (ATR), the forest canopy begins to pulse. First one flicker, then hundreds, then thousands — until entire trees appear to breathe with light. To stand in that darkness is to watch the forest write its own rhythm: a synchronous dance of fireflies, signalling across the night sky in bursts of yellow and green. For decades, villagers and vis-

itors have been surprised at these congregations. But only recently have scientists begun to systematically catalogue the species that compose this living constellation, and to understand what their presence means for a forest under pressure from human activity. A study by the Tamil Nadu Forest Department, with a year-long survey documented in a state-sanctioned report, reveals both the diversity of fireflies in the reserve and the fragility of the conditions that allow them to thrive.

The Advanced Institute for Wildlife Conservation (AIWC), based in Vandair, carried out a meticulous survey between April 2024 and March 2025.

Researchers K Ragavendan and his team scoured 10 locations — from the forest hamlets of Kozhikamuthi and Varagayalar to the agro-ecosystems of Saralappathi — collecting larvae and adult flies under the guidance of scientists M Gabriel Paulraj, S Siva Ranjani, and S Selvakumar.

In the end, eight distinct species were identified: *Abscondita perplexa*, *Abscondita terminalis*, *Asymmetricta humeralis*, three species of *Curios*, *Lamprigera* sp., and *Pyrocoelia* sp. DNA barcoding confirmed the taxonomy, and accession numbers were deposited in global databases. Each site yielded its own ecological



The survey was originally inspired by photographic work by Coimbatore-based Sriram Murali

fingerprint. Saralappathi, with its calm nights and cultivated fields, produced the highest count, dominated by *A. terminalis*. Manthirumattam and Varagayalar were strongholds of *A. perplexa*, their males and females carefully tallied along transect lines.

The study also measured environmental variables — temperature, humidity, light intensity, wind speed — capturing the atmospheric stage on which these beetles play out their nocturnal drama.

When asked about the study methods used in a dangerous forest region, especially in the dark, AIWC's Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and

Director of ANWC told The Indian Express that their team spent evenings and nights across different parts of the reserve, looking not only at the flashing displays but also at the forest floor, where larvae develop before emerging as adults.

"Fireflies are not active throughout the year — during and after the rains they perform, while the rest of the time they remain in the soil, growing until they become full-fledged insects. We carried out extensive DNA studies and larval collections to understand these life stages," he said.

The Anamalai Tiger Reserve is best known for its elephants. **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

• Study on fireflies

tigers, and lion-tailed macaques. But the fireflies offer another register of ecological wealth — smaller, quieter, but no less urgent. For researchers, there was an element of risk too. Udhayan said the fieldwork that lasted for about one year, mostly in the dark, always carried an element of risk. "But with the support of experienced forest watchers who know the terrain well, we managed safely and without incident," he said.

The study was originally inspired by earlier photographic work by Coimbatore-based Sriram Murali, whose study, in fact, triggered further research by the state government.

Fireflies do not glow for aesthetic pleasure. Their light is a coded language of courtship. If the world literature about fireflies are mostly about metaphors, their light is both pragmatic — a sexual signal, and transcendent — a reminder of impermanence. Philosophers have long used fireflies as symbols — of fleeting beauty, of memory, of the limits of human dominion over nature — or credited them for teaching us to think with time.

Scientist Paulraj, who guided the study, said both male and female fireflies possess light organs, "but in males, the organ is stronger as it extends across two segments."

When a male signals, among the hundreds and thousands of fireflies, the female responds with her own light. In this exchange, the frequency and intensity of the flashes vary, allowing the female to recognise exactly which male is courting her — this is what scientists call a mating signal.

Synchrony, the phenomenon where thousands flash in unison,

is not mere spectacle. It is an ecological marker, an indicator of habitat health. Yet this fragile communication system is increasingly interrupted. Artificial light in buffer zones — headlamps, floodlights from religious festivities, even the glow of mobile phones — confuses their signals.

"Artificial light disrupts this delicate process. When background illumination is high, males are forced to expend unprecedented energy to outshine the disturbance, altering their natural behaviour. In our study, areas with abundant fireflies were those free from artificial light. To test their preferences, we developed a phototactic movement device in the shape of a cross — one arm left in darkness and the others lit in different colours. Consistently, the fireflies chose the darkened arm, demonstrating their strong preference for darkness," he said.

The scientific findings also capture local knowledge. In a questionnaire survey across Malasar and Irula settlements inside the reserve, 97 per cent of respondents reported awareness of fireflies and a sense of their decline. Older residents often blame pesticides in surrounding farms and the contamination of streams that once ran clear. For them, the shrinking of these summer light shows is not an abstract loss of biodiversity — it is a tangible diminishment of seasonal life.

The study also gives a prescription: protect darkness. The AIWC report urges minimising light pollution around forests. Fireflies, scientists note, could serve as "indicator species" for the wider impacts of artificial lighting on nocturnal wildlife.

Important Articles

TREE GONE, DEBRIS STAYS

You still can't 'fly over' Anand Vihar

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Photos: Anindya Chattopadhyay

The trees that once blocked Anand Vihar flyover's opening are history — but their replacements, heaps of barricades and debris, continue to choke traffic. Inaugurated by the then CM, Atishi, in Dec 2024, the three-lane stretch has effectively shrunk to a single lane, thanks to cement blocks dumped carelessly along the carriageway. Ironically, the same barricades that once circled the trees remain in place, long after the forest hurdle was cleared.

Side ramps and the promised footpath, delayed earlier due to lack of clearances, remain incomplete too, leaving the ₹100-crore project looking half-done. Planned in 2019 to ease jams on Road No. 56, the flyover faced one delay



YOU READ IT HERE

A tree in the middle of brand-new flyover!

[BharatAnand/NewsIndia.com](#)

New Delhi: Public works department is set to inaugurate a new flyover in Anand Vihar, but the road is still a mess. A tree standing in the middle of the flyover is a major obstacle. The opening of the flyover has been delayed for months due to the presence of the tree. The tree is a major obstacle to the flyover. The tree is a major obstacle to the flyover. The tree is a major obstacle to the flyover.



also included from Dec 2024 to April 2025. The tree is a major obstacle to the flyover. The tree is a major obstacle to the flyover. The tree is a major obstacle to the flyover.

after another — from the pandemic to the “deemed forest” tag. Now, even with the structure open, motorists say the ride feels anything but smooth.

There was no response from PWD to TOI queries.

NGT orders action on illegal tree felling in Yamuna Vihar

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: National Green Tribunal has asked the tree officer (north) to take prompt action after a plea was filed alleging illegal felling of trees in Yamuna Vihar. The applicant claimed that a complaint was filed on June 15, but no action was taken.

He alleged that the occupier of a building in Yamuna Vihar indulged in the illegal felling of a tree, which collided with two neighbouring trees, resulting in its felling. A trench was allegedly dug next to the tree, causing it to fall and damaging the other two.

“Though a complaint dated June 15 was made to the Deputy Conservator of Forests (North), Delhi, no action has been taken till now. If a complaint is made to the tree officer, he is required to take expeditious action against the violators of the provisions of the Tree Act and ensure the protection of the tree,” observed the bench headed by Justice Prakash Shrivastava, directing the tree officer to consider the complaint as per provisions of the Delhi Preservation of Trees Act.

Important Articles

Haryana Defines Forests For First Time

Govt Says It's As Per Apex Court-Directed Dictionary Meaning, But Riders Narrow Scope

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Gurgaon: Haryana gov't has, for the first time, codified what it considers "forest as per dictionary meaning", laying the foundation for better implementation of environment laws that have been affected by ambiguity about this basic premise. But the state's definition is narrower than the frame of reference directed by Supreme Court in a 1996 ruling and contains riders that could leave out of the definition's ambit large areas the same environment laws seek to protect.

According to a notification issued on Aug 18 by the state's forest, environment and wildlife department, land parcels of at least 5 hectares in isolation or two hectares of forests adjoining notified forests qualify as 'forest' if have minimum canopy density of 0.4, or 40% of the land in question.

Effectively, this means that small patches of forests, Aravalli hillocks with low density vegetation, scrublands, grasslands and community common lands will not be considered as 'forests'.

The state's criteria explicitly exclude linear, compact and agro-forestry plantations, and orchards beyond notified forest areas, regardless of their

size or density. Examples of linear plantations are roadside green belts. Compact forests are smaller areas with dense greenery.

"Governor of Haryana is pleased to define the expression 'forest as per dictionary meaning' for the state of Haryana as follows: A patch of land shall be deemed to be forest as per dictionary meaning if it fulfils the following conditions: Firstly, it has a minimum area of 5 hectares, if it is in isolation; and a minimum area of two hectares, if it is in contiguity with govt-notified forests. Secondly, it has a canopy density of 0.4 or more. Provided that, all linear/compact/agro-forestry plantations and orchards situated outside the govt-notified forests shall not be treated as forest under the above definition," the notification signed by Anand Mohan Sharan, additional chief secretary (environment, forests and wildlife), read.

Haryana's definition, formed nearly six decades after the state came into existence, is narrower than the principle defined by Supreme Court in its landmark ruling in the 1996 TN Godavarman vs Union of India case.

The apex court had said that forests must be recogni-

CANOPY CRITERION TOO HIGH FOR HRY: EXPERTS

Definition of forest as per SC
Top court, in its 1996 TN Godavarman vs Union of India case, emphasised on application of 'dictionary meaning of forests' - which means all areas that meet the characteristics of forests must be protected under the Forest (Conservation) Act, regardless of the land's ownership or its status in govt records

Haryana's criteria for 'forest by dictionary definition'
Puts the following two conditions for recognising forests:

- 1 5-hectare forest area in isolation
- 2 These forests must have canopy density of at least 0.4, which means at least 40% of the ground should be covered by tree crowns

What this excludes | Scrublands, grasslands, strip forests, low vegetation forests, plantations, orchards, patches of agro-forestry vegetation, small groves, common lands

Experts say the state's definition would exclude most of the Aravalis that don't have any legal cover as the hill range is naturally a 'semi-arid' forest

sed according to the 'dictionary meaning of forest' - a criterion that means any area with characteristics of forests must be protected under the Forest (Conservation) Act, regardless of the land's status in govt records.

This concept, which came

to be known as 'deemed forest', widened the scope of FCA and allowed protection of all such green areas from urbanisation and deforestation.

Experts on Tuesday said the state's definition would leave out a large chunk of Aravalis from getting the legal cover.

"This definition doesn't even consider the ground realities that are unique to the state. Aravalis are major scrub forest and have a canopy density of 10% to 30%. This definition won't even protect the habitat of Haryana's state bird black francolin and state

animal blackbuck because these species live in grasslands... This will only benefit the builder lobby," said MD Sinha, retired conservator of forests, Haryana (south).

Forest analyst Chetan Agarwal, meanwhile, bashing the state's definition, said: "It is a pity that Haryana has blindly followed the lead of states like Goa in choosing a minimum threshold of 40% forest canopy cover to identify an area as a deemed forest. At least in the Aravalli hills, open forest with 10%-40% canopy cover and scrub (0-10% cover) categories should have been treated as forest as per dictionary meaning. This decision opens up the Aravalis to the ravages of urbanisation and mining."

Protecting the Aravalis is critical not just for the state, but most of north-west India. The ancient hill range is the only barrier that stops the Thar desert from expanding towards the plains. It is also home to a rich and unique diversity of flora and fauna.

The exercise to come up with a definition of forests as per dictionary meaning was ordered by Supreme Court, which on March 4 directed all states and union territories to identify forests to prevent the loss of green cover.

Haryana defines forest, 'as per dictionary'

Activists say this could exclude most of the state's remaining Aravalli forests from legal protection

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CHANDIGARH: Haryana has taken the extraordinary step of defining what constitutes a "dictionary meaning" of forest, 18 months after the Supreme Court reiterated its December 1996 order asking the states to identify forests using that very phrase's broad interpretation.

In a notification issued on August 18, the state government defined the expression "forest as per dictionary meaning" with restrictive technical criteria that environmental activists say could exclude most of the state's remaining Aravalli forests from legal protection.

The definition requires forest areas to have a minimum canopy density of 40% and cover at least five hectares if isolated, or two hectares in contiguity to government-notified forests. It however excluded all linear, compact, agro-forestry plantations and orchards situated outside the government notified forests.

The definition coined by the state government would pave the way for identification of forest as per the dictionary meaning. This will facilitate preparation of a consolidated record, including the forest like areas identified by an expert committee constituted for this purpose, unclassified forest lands or com-



The definition requires forest areas to have a minimum canopy density of 40% and cover at least five hectares if isolated, or two hectares in contiguity to government-notified forests.

munity forest lands on which the provisions of the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980, will be made applicable. "Since a definition is in place now, the state government would constitute an expert committee to identify the forest areas in the state as per the newly defined dictionary meaning criteria," said a forest official. The report will be submitted to the central government which will place it before the Supreme Court.

Apex court asked for dictionary meaning of forests in 1996

The Supreme Court (SC) in its December 12, 1996, judgement in TN Godavarman case had reiterated the Forest Conservation Act, 1980, to include within its scope not only forests as mentioned in government record but all areas that are forests in the

dictionary meaning of the term irrespective of the ownership and classification. The Haryana government however did not come up with a dictionary meaning of the forest all these years.

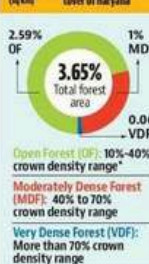
The apex court while hearing another petition (Ashok Kumar Sharma vs Union of India) escalated pressure on states to comply with the broad forest definition. The challenge in this case arose because the Forest Conservation (amendment) Act 2023 would have legalised all forest diversions between 1980 and 1996, while stripping protection from unrecorded forests.

The main grievance raised by the petitioners in the Ashok Sharma case was that the Forest Conservation (amendment) Act, 2023, has an effect of diluting the definition of forest as defined by SC in its December 12, 1996, order. They contended that as per the order in Godavarman

GREEN COVER

44,212 Total geographical area of Haryana (sq km)

1,614 Total forest cover of Haryana (sq km)



*Crown density is the proportion of the ground that is covered by the tree canopies
Source: India State of Forest Report 2023

case the definition of forest has to be understood in the dictionary sense and Section 1A of the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980, is likely to restrict the definition of forest and exclude the aforesaid category of forest, as understood in accordance with the dictionary sense, from the ambit of the Forest Conservation Act, 1980.

Rules require states to prepare consolidated record of forest land
The SC said that rule 16 (i) of Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Rules, 2023 required all state governments to prepare a consolidated record of such lands, including the forest like areas identified by the expert committee constituted for this purpose, unclassified forest lands or community forest lands on which the provisions of the 1980 Act shall be made applicable.

"We find that once an exercise, as required to be done under Rule 16 (i) is completed, it will lead to resolution of many issues. It is thus necessary that all state governments make an earnest effort to complete the said exercise within a stipulated period. While doing so, they would also be bound to follow the SC guidelines of July 6, 2011 order in Lafarge case which mandated creation of a GIS based decision support database, tentatively containing inter alia the district-wise details of the location and boundary of each plot of land that may be defined as forest for the purpose of the Forest Conservation Act, the core, buffer and eco-sensitive zone of the protected areas constituted as per the provisions of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, the important migratory corridors for wildlife and forest land diverted for non-forest purpose in the past in the district. The digital toposheets of Survey of India, the forest cover maps prepared by the Forest Survey of India in preparation of the successive state of forest reports and the conditions stipulated in the approvals accorded under the Forest Conservation Act for each case of diversion of forest land in the district will also be part of the proposed decision support database."

The redefinition, activists say, will deal a blow to the Aravalli forests, especially the 40% canopy density requirement for a region that has naturally adapted to dry conditions with scrub and open forest cover.

"Even Asola Bhatti wildlife sanctuary in Delhi Aravalis and contiguous to Gurgaon and Faridabad Aravalis would not meet this high threshold. The minimum area threshold of two and five hectares is also unreasonably high for such a dry state and should have been kept at 1 and 2 hectares respectively," independent forest analyst Chetan Agarwal said.

Agarwal explained that while the northern Shivaliks receive 1000-1200mm of annual rainfall, the Aravalis in the south and west get just 300-600mm annually. "This low rainfall and the rocky terrain creates tough conditions for growth of the Aravalis forests and therefore the Aravalli vegetation has adapted over millions of years into a stunted growth of thorny and dry deciduous species and scrub forest conditions."

"At least in the Aravalli hills the open forest (10-40%) and scrub (0-10%) categories should have been treated as forest as per dictionary meaning and 10% should have been the threshold in the rest of the state," Agarwal said.

"The decision to keep such a high threshold of forest cover of 40% will further exclude much of the potential deemed forest of the Aravalis from the protective embrace of the Forest Conservation Act and may facilitate opening them up to the ravages of the licences of Town and Country Planning and Mining departments and their clients," Agarwal said.

Important Articles

Why environmentalists have criticised Haryana govt's definition of 'forest'

VARINDER BHATIA
CHANDIGARH, AUGUST 21

THE HARYANA government on Monday officially defined what the word "forest" means. Officials say that the state's definition is aligned with "judicial expectations". But environmentalists have criticised it for being too narrow and leaving the ecologically sensitive Aravalli ridge vulnerable to illegal mining and real estate encroachment.

Haryana's definition

In its notification, Haryana's Environment, Forest and Wildlife department stated: "A patch of land shall be deemed to be forest as per dictionary meaning" if it fulfils following conditions: ■ It has a minimum area of five hectares, if it is in isolation, and a minimum area of two hectares, if it is in contiguity with the government notified forests; and ■ It has a canopy density of 0.4 (40%) or more".

The notification further specifies that "all linear/compact/agro-forestry plantations and orchards situated outside the government notified forests shall not be treated as forests under the above definition".

SC's recent directives

On March 4, the Supreme Court had directed all States and Union Territories to define what constitutes a "forest", and commission surveys to identify forest areas in their respective jurisdictions.

The court said that States and UTs must constitute expert committees within one month to identify "forest-like areas", "unclassified forest lands", and "community forest lands", and that these committees must complete their mapping of forest lands and submit a report to the Centre within six months.

The court further said that "the process must strictly follow a GIS-based decision support database that includes — district-wise plots that may qualify as 'forest' under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 (FCA);

Core, buffer, and eco-sensitive zones of protected areas; important wildlife migratory corridors; lands diverted from forest use in the past; and supporting maps like TOPO-sheets and Forest Survey of India maps".

Chief Secretaries of States and Administrators of UTs who fail to comply will be held "personally accountable for any non-compliance [with the court's directives]", the court said.

Godavaram & the FCA

The court issued these directives while hearing a challenge to the 2023 amendment to the FCA/Ashok Kumar Sharma, IPS (Retd) & Ors vs Union of India. At the heart of both the amendment and the challenge is the question: "what constitutes a forest?"

The FCA restricted "the diversion of forests or use of forest land for non-forest purpose". The Act barred the diversion of forest land for non-forest purposes without the prior approval of the Centre.

EXPLAINED ENVIRONMENT

In 1996, a Supreme Court Bench of Justices J S Verma and Justice B N Kirpal in *T N Godavaram Thirumulpad v Union of India* ruled that the word "forest" "must be understood according to its dictionary meaning" which "covers all statutorily recognised forests, whether designated as reserved, protected or otherwise".

This was a landmark order: effectively, any portion of forested land, regardless of size, official status or ownership, could be deemed a forest.

This widening of the applicability of the FCA, according to the Statement of Objects and Reasons of the 2023 amendment, was "restraining the authorities from undertaking any change in the land use and allowing any development or utility related work".

Today, this (the FCA) comes in the way of building even toilets in schools for tribal girls," Environment Minister Bhupinder Yadav had said in Parliament while introducing the amendment. The 2023 amendment made the FCA applicable only to no-

tified forests and lands that were identified as forest in government records.

A group of retired Indian Forest Service officers and NGOs challenged the amendment on the grounds that it "substantially diluted" the FCA. In February 2024, the apex court directed all UTs and State governments to follow Godavaram's definition of forest while it was hearing Ashok Kumar Sharma.

The next hearing in the case is scheduled for September 9.

Reactions to Haryana's move

Although Haryana constituted state- and district-level committees in April, surveys were stalled until a formal definition of forest was finalised. Officials say that "with the official notification, these committees can finally proceed clearing the path for surveys that determine which areas qualify as forests, a critical step in ensuring they gain protection under the FCA".

Environmentalists, however, have been critical of Haryana's definition which, they

say, creates "a very high threshold" for classification as forest. "It is a pity that Haryana has blindly followed the lead of states like Goa in choosing a minimum threshold of 40% forest canopy cover to identify an area as a deemed forest," forest analyst Chetan Agarwal told *The Indian Express*.

"The Aravallis in the south and west (of Haryana) get only 300 to 600 mm rainfall annually. This low rainfall and the rocky terrain creates tough conditions for growth of forests in the Aravallis. Vegetation here has adapted over millions of years into a stunted growth of thorny and dry deciduous species and scrub forest conditions," he said.

"The decision to keep such a high threshold will exclude much of the Aravallis from the protective embrace of the FCA," Agarwal said, adding this definition was prima facie violative of the 1996 Godavaram judgement. "The minimum area threshold of 2 and 5 hectares is also unreasonably high for such a dry state and should have been kept at 1 and 2 hectares, respectively," he added.

 The Indian EXPRESS

Fri, 22 August 2025
<https://epaper.indianexpress.com/c/78008894>



Expert panel suggests green nod for 3,097 MW Arunachal project

NIKHIL GHANEKAR
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 11

AN EXPERT panel of the Union Environment Ministry has recommended environmental clearance for the 3,087 MW Etalin hydroelectric project in Arunachal Pradesh's Dibang valley, as per minutes of the panel's July 30 meeting.

Etalin is a large run-of-river project on the Dri and Tangon Rivers and involves construction of concrete gravity dams to divert water through two separate waterway systems.

The Dri River, after meeting Mathun, flows downstream and is joined by Tangon near Etalin village, where it is called Dibang River, as per details recorded by the Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) on hydroelectric and river valley projects.

The project will involve di-

version of 1,175 hectares of prime sub-tropical pine, wet evergreen, semi-evergreen, montane wet temperate, and moist alpine scrub forest and an estimated 2.7 lakh trees will be felled.

"The EAC after examining the information submitted and detailed deliberations, reiterated its earlier recommendation on the project and recommended the proposal for grant of prior environmental clearance to the Etalin hydroelectric project in an area of 1175.03 hectares," the EAC said, as per minutes of its meeting.

The project will be developed by the Satluj Jal Vidyut Nigam (SJVN) Ltd. The EAC had recommended clearance for the project in 2017.

However, it was placed before the panel again for appraisal as the ministry's norms mandate that if the project's environmen-

tal impact assessment data is over three years old, it has to be referred back to EAC.

Several Schedule-I species, granted highest protection under law, such as red panda, leopard, asiatic black bear, clouded leopard, tiger are found in the upper reaches of Dibang valley, as per a biodiversity study of the Wildlife Institute of India (WII).

Overlooking its own previous concerns, the forest advisory committee of the environment ministry had granted in-principle forest clearance for the project in May, using WII study as a basis to gauge impact on wildlife. Conservationists have in the past panned the WII study for its limited study period.

Though the WII study did not record the presence of tigers in the project area, the study itself had said that tiger presence and movement in the project area cannot be ruled out.

Important Articles

4 youths cling to tree, escape being swept away to Pak

NDRF, Army In Dramatic Punjab Rescue Ops

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Bathinda/Chandigarh/Gurdaspur: A dramatic rescue unfolded on the flooded India-Pakistan border Wednesday as an NDRF team raced to save four youngsters, including a 16-year-old boy, clinging to a eucalyptus tree while surrounded by raging floodwater.

The boy had been swept away by floodwater at Fazilka's Teja Rohella village, situated on the Zero Line. Three youngsters tried to save him but all four were swept away in the current. They would have been swept into Pakistan but for the eucalyptus tree, which they clung to for dear life.

A fortnight ago, villagers had banded together to pull back a boat that was being swept into Pakistan.

Even as the border rescue was on, 300km away in Gurdaspur, it was touch and go for about 400 students and 40 staff members of a residential school as floodwater inundated the ground floor. All of them clambered to the first floor and watched with trepidation as the floodwater continued to rise. Rescue teams from Army and NDRF sped to the school on boats and carried them to safety.

Following heavy rainfall



Rescue teams rushed to save 400 students and 40 staff members of a residential school in Gurdaspur

and release of dam water, Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya in Daburi was inundated. Though Punjab govt has ordered all schools shut till Aug 30 due to flood fears, all students of the boarding school were on campus.

Heavy rainfall added to Punjab's flood fears, particularly in border districts of Amritsar, Pathankot, Gurdaspur and Tarn Taran. Punjab recorded 243% excess rainfall in a 24-hour period — 14.4mm against the usual 4.2mm. The entire region is being pounded by rain. Haryana recorded 247% excess rain and Himachal Pradesh 118%.

Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann deployed his govt helicopter for flood relief efforts after witnessing first-hand the plight of residents. "The people who gave our party 92 seats and gave me the services of the helicopter, I am handing it over to them," Mann said.

{ GREAT NICOBAR PROJECT }

Centre didn't comply with NGT order: Plea

Jayashree Nandi

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NEW DELHI: The Union government has not complied with the National Green Tribunal's (NGT) April 3, 2023 order on revisiting the deficiencies in the environmental clearance granted to the Great Nicobar Holistic Development project, a petitioner challenging the green nod to the key project has claimed before NGT.

In a 39-page detailed submission made on July 24 by petitioner-environmentalist Ashish Kothari said the objective of this application is to seek the enforcement and implementation of the law. The petitioner highlighted that the three terms of reference for the NGT-appointed high-powered committee (HPC) were not met — specifically related to coral transplantation, environmental baseline data collection and review coastal regulation zone (CRZ) boundaries of the proposed port project.

On April 3, 2023, NGT directed that clearance dated November 11, 2022 be revisited in the light of "some unanswered deficiencies" pointed out by the appellants which need to be addressed. "By way of instance, it is pointed out that out of 20,668 coral colonies, 16,150 are proposed to be translocated without any mention of threat to the remaining 4,518 coral colonies. It is pointed out that ICRZ Regulations prohibit destruction of corals. Further, data collected for impact assessment is only of one season as against requirement of three seasons. It is also shown that part of the project is in the CRZ IA area where Port is prohibited," the NGT had said.

HT had reported on April 7, 2023 that NGT had constituted a high-powered committee, headed by Union environment ministry secretary, to revisit the environmental clearance (EC) granted by the ministry to the Great Nicobar township and area development project. Experts, however, have questioned how a subordinate authority headed by the environment secretary revisits the green nod granted by its own ministry?

In the submission to NGT, the petitioner has pointed out that several clauses of the Island Coastal Regulation Zone (ICRZ) Notification, 2019 and its annexure prohibit the destruction of



The petitioner prayed that ecologically sensitive areas be excluded from project areas. AFP

corals. Annexure I to the notification prohibits destruction of corals, coral reefs and surrounding areas and allows coral transplantation activities only when necessary for regeneration after obtaining permission under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. Activities like dredging and discharge of ballast water are also prohibited in and around coral reefs.

"Even according to the MoEFCC, the HPC has only looked at the Zoological Survey of India's (ZSI) proposal to translocate coral colonies, and has agreed with the recommendation of ZSI. The mandate of the law, the fact that coral reefs are protected and that their translocation is not permitted by law etc. have not even been considered by the HPC," the submission said.

Importantly, the petitioner has pointed out that fringing coral reefs around the island have been marked clearly in the draft ICRZ coastal land use plans prepared under the 2019 notification but they are not there in the approved land use plans.

"Even according to the MoEFCC, the ZSI's report itself states that 16,150 coral colonies need to be translocated due to the port project. The ICRZ Notification, 2019 does not permit such transplantation to facilitate or clear the area for a port..." it added.

It further claimed that the second aspect of TOR was also not met. "The MoEFCC and the HPC have failed to see that the requirement of comprehensive EIA, i.e. an EIA based on three season data collection, is mandated under the ICRZ Notification, 2019 and the EIA guidance manual itself requires data collection of more than one season..." it said, adding

that the survey of ecology and biology was conducted between December 14 and 22, 2020, and the survey of leatherbacks was conducted between February 12 and 18, 2021 and hence the season was not covered.

The third ToR was to "Review the boundaries of the port project with respect to ICRZ Notification, 2019." The tribunal in its April 2023 verdict has observed that "it is also shown that part of the project is in the CRZ IA area where Port is prohibited."

The 2019 notification lists mangroves, corals and coral reefs, biologically active mud flats, turtle nesting grounds, nesting grounds of birds as CRZ IA — ecologically sensitive areas. "It is submitted that coral reefs, turtle nesting sites, megapode (bird) nesting grounds, mangroves, etc. do not and cannot magically disappear to suit the convenience of the project proponent. It is shocking that the HPC has relied only on a report of the NCSCM, the consultant of the project proponent, to come to the conclusion that no part of the project area falls under CRZ IA," the submission said.

The petitioner also prayed that ecologically sensitive areas be excluded from project areas.

"Unless this tribunal directs the exclusion of admitted CRZ IA areas such as coral reefs along the coast, turtle nesting grounds, megapode nesting grounds, biologically active mudflats etc. from the project area, they will be converted and destroyed," it said.

The matter was heard by NGT's eastern bench on July 24. People aware of the matter said additional solicitor general (ASG) Aishwarya Bhati submitted that the ministry did not violate any law and was aware of the sensitive nature of the island's environment and has ensured that sustainable development is achieved while keeping in mind the strategic requirements to ensure national security.

The hearing was adjourned and the tribunal directed the MoEFCC to produce the revised layout which excludes all the CRZ-IA areas from the port, according to lawyers. The matter will be heard again on August 6.

ASG Bhati did not respond to HT's request for a comment on whether the ministry will be making a submission on other concerns raised in the application.

Important Articles

World's highest bird death rates at Thar Desert wind farms

Across seven multi-season surveys, Wildlife Institute of India researchers searched for bird carcasses within a 150-m radius of 90 randomly selected wind turbines and found 124

Nikhil Sreekandan

In the first half of 2025, India added around 3.5 GW to the wind sector — an 82% year-on-year growth — taking the total installed capacity to 51.3 GW. According to the National Institute of Wind Energy, India's gross wind power potential is 1162.9 GW at 150 m above ground level. India's ambitious climate goals and surging energy demands mean renewable energy development will continue to accelerate.

Experts are concerned, however, that the addition of wind power capacity has been coming at the expense of avian welfare. For years, researchers have raised concerns about the impact of wind turbines on fauna, particularly birds. A study by the Wildlife Institute of India, published recently in *Scientific Reports*, has estimated that bird mortality rates at wind farms are the highest in the world in India's Thar Desert.

The study was conducted in a 3,000 sq. km desert landscape in Jaisalmer, Rajasthan, home to around 900 wind turbines and 272 bird species, including the critically endangered great Indian bustard (*Ardeotis nigriceps*). Across seven multi-season surveys, Wildlife Institute researchers searched for bird carcasses within a 150-m radius of 90 randomly selected wind turbines and found 124. The estimated annual bird mortality per 1,000 sq. km came up to 4,464



birds after correcting for non-detection due to vegetation cover or carcass degradation during the survey and due to carcass scavenging before the survey. The researchers conducted similar surveys at 28 randomly selected control sites (between 500 and 2,000 m of any turbine) to account for the natural mortality of birds and found no carcasses. "Very few studies have robust data to have accurate assessments that correct for detection issues and have controls for comparison," Yadavendra Jhala, one of the authors of the study, said.

A 2019 study documented bird deaths at wind farms in Kutch and Daman. However, the estimate of 0.47 bird deaths per turbine per year at both sites now pale in com-

parison to the 1.24 bird deaths per turbine per month in Thar. "It's quite a high estimate, but that's quite possible," Ramesh Kumar Sevaraj, an independent consultant and author of the 2019 paper, said. The mortality rate "will vary depending on geography, season, and other factors."

Bird density, infrastructure density, and configuration are also crucial factors, according to Jhala. The Thar Desert is also part of the Central Asian Flyway, a major migration route for birds across Eurasia, and a prominent wintering destination.

The desert mortality estimates also included bird collisions with power lines linked to the wind turbines. The Gujarat and Karnataka study didn't include this cause.

Per both studies, raptors were the most affected group of birds, echoing findings worldwide. Organisations like BirdLife International have proposed several mitigation measures to reduce bird collisions with wind turbines, including painting one of the turbine blades to increase visibility and shutting turbines down at a certain time of day or season. However, Sevaraj said the most crucial step in mitigation is to carefully select the site of a wind farm.

From land to ocean Offshore wind farms are emerging as a valuable renewable energy resource worldwide. According to the Global Wind Energy Council, operational offshore wind capacity worldwide is currently around

83 GW. With a coastline stretching across 7,600 km and exclusive economic zones covering 2.3 million sq. km, India has considerable offshore potential of its own. It aims to install 30 GW of capacity by 2030.

However, despite the growing interest, there has been limited research on the environmental consequences of offshore wind farms. Offshore wind energy is a complex infrastructure asset that requires detailed marine spatial planning exercises to assess environmental and social impacts, according to Gopal K. Sarangi, head of the Department of Policy and Management Studies at the TERI School of Advanced Studies, New Delhi.

According to the National Offshore Wind Energy Policy, unlike other renewable energy developments in the country, environmental impact assessments are essential for offshore wind energy.

The rapid environmental impact assessment report of the proposed offshore wind farm in the Gulf of Khambhat in Gujarat documented five marine mammals, including dolphins, sharks, and a reptile within the study area. While the report recognised that increased turbidity and noise levels during the construction phase of the wind farm may drive away highly sensitive species, it deemed the noise and vibrations during the operation phase to be "limited". (Nikhil Sreekandan is an independent journalist)

DEFINING A FOREST

Criteria tweak 'cuts' Assam forest by 99%

Jayashree Nandi

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NEW DELHI: A retired forest official has flagged how Assam's restrictive technical criteria to define what is a forest led to 99% of acknowledged woodland — roughly 1,153 of 1,168 hectares — in Dima Hasao region to be stripped of forest safeguards.

The dramatic reduction, detailed in a February Central Empowered Committee report, occurred despite state authorities acknowledging the area consists of "unclassified state forest" with 20% to 70% tree cover that "falls within the definition of forest as per the order of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India."

The revelation comes amid growing concerns about states undermining Supreme Court orders through narrow definitions. Earlier this week, Haryana redefined the "dictionary meaning" of forest with criteria that activists say could exclude most of the state's remaining Aravalli forests from legal protection.

The Assam controversy relates to a project in Dima Hasao, a hill district characterised by rugged mountainous terrain and significant natural forest cover. The region is part of the North Cachar Hills, falling within a biodiversity-rich landscape.

The Central Empowered Committee (CEC) of the Supreme Court, while probing an application by a cement company to refund money paid for forest clearance formalities, found that the

firm contended that seven new limestone mining blocks adjacent to its existing mine in Dima Hasao did not require forest clearance. The company had paid ₹56.85 crores in compensatory afforestation costs, net present value, tree operation costs and other fees for clearing its original site as part of environment protection regulations.

After plotting coordinates on the environment ministry's Decision Support System, the company found none of the proposed new blocks were classified as recorded forest land. Concluding it had unnecessarily obtained forest clearance for its earlier mine, the company sought a full refund of all charges paid, along with accrued interest.

Restrictive 2022 definition applied

At the heart of these claims is Rule 21(e)(iii) of the Assam Trees Outside Forest (Sustainable Management) Rule, 2022, which states that an area qualifies as forest only if it constitutes "a continuous patch of 10 hectares or more having not less than 200 naturally growing trees per hectare on an average," alongside reserved forests and officially recorded forest areas.

When the CEC visited the site in September, 2024 and asked Assam for its state expert committee report on deemed forests — as required under the 1996 TN Godavaram Supreme Court order — the state government failed to produce one. Earlier that year, the Supreme Court had



Concerns are growing over states' changing definitions.

ordered states to classify forests as per the "dictionary meaning" of the word, a ruling that meant states had to follow broad, common-sense interpretation of the word forests. Instead, special chief secretary (forests) MK Yadava and other officials proposed using the 2022 definition.

The entire 1,168-hectare patch of unclassified forest covering six mine areas was then surveyed using drones, with only 14.53 hectares meeting the restrictive tree-counting criteria. "Therefore, the CEC has given its finding/order that except for the 14.53 ha is a forest the rest of the area, i.e. 1,153 ha is not a forest and can be used for mining without having to obtain forest clearance," the former forest official told HT, asking not to be named.

Special chief secretary Yadava confirmed to HT that the 2022 rules will now be applied statewide to classify forests, and thus, environmental protections. "A new state expert committee will

identify deemed forest areas based on the trees outside forest rules and revenue records," Yadava said, adding that the definition applies statewide.

The case exposes stark contradictions in official positions. Both the divisional forest officer and the secretary of environment & forest department told the CEC that the mining area "falls within the definition of Forest as per the order of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India" and consists of "Unclassified State Forest" under the Dima Hasao Division (West) in Hallong.

However, despite this acknowledgment in a June 14, 2024 response, "no documents pertaining to Unclassified State Forest were submitted by either the Forest Department or the Applicant," the CEC noted.

The committee then ultimately concluded that except for 14.53 hectares, "the rest of the area, i.e. 1,153 ha is not a forest and can be used for mining without having to obtain forest clearance," according to the retired forest official who analysed the case.

Forest analyst Chetan Agarwal said Assam's approach reflects a troubling pattern across states. "Assam has proposed a threshold of 200 trees per hectare for identifying deemed forests. This is a high threshold particularly as small trees are sometimes not treated as a 'tree' while counting trees for such purposes as a matter of practice of enumeration from a timber perspective," He noted that the threshold "may not be met by much of the officially notified for-

ests either and is meant primarily to exclude all but the most dense forest cover with many young trees. As they mature, the stems per ha reduce over time."

Agarwal drew parallels with other states: "Recently Haryana too has come up with an extraordinarily high minimum level of 40% forest canopy cover for an area to be treated as a deemed forest. This threshold too will not be met by most of the notified forests in the state either, let alone the potential deemed forest."

The December 12, 1996 Godavaram judgment defined forests broadly as any area fitting the "dictionary meaning" regardless of official classification or ownership, directing states to form expert committees within a month to identify such areas.

The Forest Conservation Amendment Act, 2023, notably does not recognise "unrecorded deemed forests" as a protected category, with the objective of reviewing and limiting the Supreme Court's 1996 verdict. Eleven retired government officials and environmental activists successfully challenged this amendment, leading to an interim order reaffirming the broad dictionary definition.

The Central Empowered Committee denied the cement company's ₹56.85 crore refund request, ruling that since substantial vegetation had already been removed from the earlier mining area, it was impossible to determine the original forest status when the lease was granted years earlier.

Media Coverage

{ **BUDDHA JAYANTI PARK** } SC-APPOINTED PANEL

‘Act against CPWD for illegal tree pruning’

Jasjeev Gandhiok

htreporters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court-appointed Central Empowered Committee (CEC) has recommended action against the Central Public Works Department (CPWD) for installing underground water tanks and pipelines at the Buddha Jayanti Park in the Central Ridge without taking requisite permissions.

In a new report, CEC estimated that at least nine trees were illegally pruned for such construction work, and asked the Supreme Court to direct CPWD to restore this impacted area by planting at least 90 indigenous trees species and three concentric rows of at least 1,000 indigenous fruit bearing trees and shrubs on the park's periphery this rainy season.

Among the other recommendations were the development of water bodies, the creation of a nursery, rainwater harvesting, a composting facility, labelling of plants, and the preparation of an inventory of birds and butterflies as restorative and compensatory

measures for the violations, it said in the report dated August 20.

The action comes on a plea filed by the NGO “New Delhi Nature Society”, which told the court that it saw widespread unlawful excavation and felling of trees using earthmovers during a visit to the park in April 2024. The petitioner had said that the activity involved the felling or uprooting of several trees and was undertaken without obtaining any statutory clearance under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980. Following this, the Supreme Court had issued a notice to CPWD in May last year.

In response, CPWD had said that due to increasing tourist footfall and scarcity of irrigation water, oral instructions were issued in July 2023 by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs for ensuring adequate raw water supply to sustain the greenery and biodiversity of the park.

“CPWD said it proposed the construction of two underground tanks for the storage of unfiltered irrigation water and that work began in April 2024

with site clearance of dead vegetation and barricading of the barren area,” the report said.

CEC carried out a ground visit on August 16, also adding that it analysed Google Earth images to assess damage on-ground.

“The ‘breaking of land’ for the construction of water storage tanks constitutes a ‘non-forestry activity’ and undertaking such work without the prior approval of the central government is a violation of the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980,” said the report.

CEC said Google Earth imagery further revealed that between 2022 and 2024, extensive excavation was undertaken, resulting in the creation of two large pits, clearance of ground vegetation, and discernible disturbance of tree cover.

“While large-scale felling of mature trees is not evident, undergrowth and small trees were cleared, and lopping/pruning of larger trees appears to have been undertaken to facilitate excavation and construction,” the report said, adding that nine trees were pruned.

Media Coverage

Panel Flags Violation Of Norms At Buddha Jayanti Park, Seeks Action

Asks SC To Direct Officials To Restore Affected Area, CPWD Cites Oral Orders

Priyangi Agarwal
@timesofindia.com

New Delhi: Central Empowered Committee (CEC) of Supreme Court has recommended action against CPWD officials for installing underground water tanks and associated pipelines in Buddha Jayanti Park, within the ecologically-sensitive Central Ridge Reserved Forest, without permission. It also flagged the illegal pruning of nearly nine trees.

CEC also asked the Supreme Court to direct CPWD to restore the affected area by undertaking compensatory afforestation through the plantation of 90 indigenous tree species and the plantation of three concentric rows, each consisting of not less than 1,000 indigenous fruit-bearing trees and shrubs along the park's periphery. It has also recommended the development of water bodies, the creation of a nursery, rainwater harvesting, a composting facility, the labelling of plants, and the preparation of an inventory of birds and butterflies.

The case stems from a contempt petition filed by the petitioner—New Delhi Nature Society—in the apex court alleging that during a visit in April 2024 to Buddha Jayanti Park, which forms part of the Central Ridge, large-scale unlawful excavation was witnessed. The petitioner claimed the activity involved the felling or uprooting of several trees and was undertaken without obtaining any statutory clearance under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980. Following this, Supreme Court issued a notice to CPWD

VIOLATIONS FOUND AT BUDDHA JAYANTI PARK

- Supreme Court's approval not taken for installing underground water tanks and pipelines. The permission was needed because the park falls in ridge area
- Construction of water storage tanks constitutes a 'non-forestry activity'. Undertaking such work without prior approval of Central govt is a violation of the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980
- Nine trees were illegally pruned in violation of the Delhi Preservation of Trees Act, 1992

RECOMMENDATIONS TO SUPREME COURT

- To restore the affected area by undertaking compensatory afforestation through plantation of 90 indigenous tree species
- CPWD shall plant and maintain three concentric rows, each consisting of not less than 1,000 indigenous fruit-bearing trees and shrubs, along the periphery of the park during the current rainy season
- Development of water bodies to support birds and other wildlife
- Imposition of complete ban on single-use plastic in the park



- Development of a strong nursery, with a long-term vision of distributing home herbal garden kits and other

plants to the public

- Labelling of all plants, and preparation of a detailed inventory of resident and migratory birds, butterflies, and other wild fauna present in the park
- Creation of appropriate rainwater harvesting structures
- Development of proper and adequate composting facility within the park
- CPWD shall ensure that a minimum level of cleaning and filtration is carried out before the release of polluted water into gardens and green areas

the site on Aug 16 this year and also analysed the imageries of Google Earth. "The 'breaking of land' for the construction of water storage tanks constitutes a 'non-forestry activity' and undertaking such work without the prior approval of the Central govt is a violation of the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980," said the CEC.

Google Earth imagery revealed that between 2022 and 2024, extensive excavation was undertaken, resulting in the creation of two large pits, clearance of ground vegetation, and discernible disturbance of tree cover. "While large-scale felling of mature trees is not evident, undergrowth and small trees were cleared, and lopping/pruning of larger trees appears to have been undertaken to facilitate excavation and construction," said the CEC. It estimated that nine trees were pruned in violation of the Delhi Preservation of Trees Act, 1994.

Besides the compensatory plantation of 90 indigenous species, CEC has recommended that the CPWD shall undertake immediate ecological improvement measures in Buddha Jayanti Park, including the development of water bodies to support birds and other wildlife, development of a strong nursery with a long-term vision of distributing home herbal garden kits and other plants to the public in the future, preparation of an inventory of birds, butterflies, and others, the creation of appropriate rainwater harvesting structures, a composting facility, and the imposition of a complete ban on single-use plastic.

in this matter in May last year.

However, CPWD claimed that due to increasing tourist footfall and scarcity of irrigation water, oral instructions were issued in July 2023 by the ministry of housing and ur-

ban affairs for ensuring adequate raw water supply to sustain the greenery and biodiversity of the park. CPWD said it proposed the construction of two underground tanks for the storage of unfiltered irri-

gation water and that "work began in April 2024 which involved site clearance of dead vegetation and barricading of the barren area."

Following the order of the Supreme Court, CEC visited



Here are some hot nature gossip tweets from our @NDN_HQ page in August.

Dive into these juicy stories by clicking the links and get ready to be wowed!

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Supreme Court Prohibits Feeding of Stray Dogs in Public Places.

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This Is Not Doable, Mrs. Gandhi, On SC's Order To Remove Stray Dogs.

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5 Cubs Died At The Delhi Zoo, Only One Remains.

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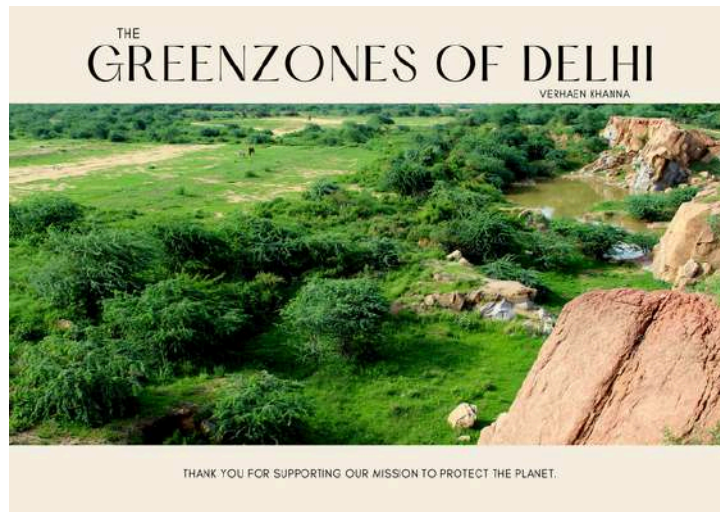
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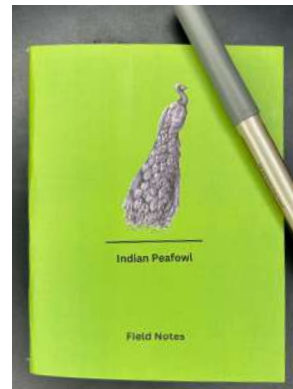
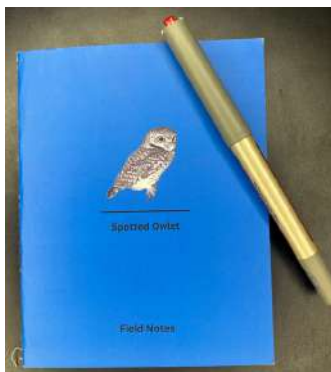
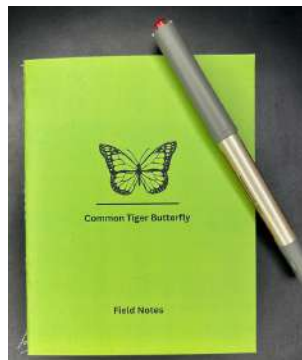
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Internship Form

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Donate a book to the NDNS library



We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to all the amazing individuals who have donated nature-related books towards the #newdelhinaturesociety library. Your generosity will help us in building a comprehensive library that will be a valuable resource for nature enthusiasts and students alike. If you too would like to contribute to our library, we welcome book donations and encourage you to get in touch with us for more information. You can visit our website at www.ndns.in to learn more about our organization and our various initiatives.

De-Choke Trees

The Hon'ble National Green Tribunal in its order dated 23rd April 2013 has directed all Public Authorities to ensure that all the sign boards, names, advertisements, any kind of boards or signage's, electric wires and high tension cables or otherwise are removed from the trees.

They shall also ensure that the concrete surrounding the trees within one meter of the trees are removed and all the trees are looked after well and due precaution is taken in future so that no concrete or construction or repairing work is done at least within one meter radius of the trunk of trees.

NAILS, WIRES (10,000 RS. FINE).

NGT ORDER FOR DE-CHOKING TREES

DELHI PRESERVATION OF TREES ACT



SOS NUMBERS (TREES AND ANIMALS)

- NDNS - 9711115666
- Wildlife Rescue - 9810129698, 9810639698
- People For Animals - 011 23719293 / 9294.
- For Cows - Dhyani Foundation - 9999099423

A TREE IS BEING CUT?

- Click pictures
- Tell them to stop immediately
- Ask them to show the Forest Department permission.
- No permission, then Call 100 and wait till help arrives.
- Report the matter on the Green Helpline 011-23378513
- Write a letter to the Forest Department
- If they do have permission, then take the supervisor's details who must be present there and contact the Forest Department .

FOREST DEPT. EMAILS

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