

Residents of Navi Mumbai raise mangroves' destruction with forest minister

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LARGE-SCALE DEFORESTATION of mangroves and associated trees in Sector 52A of Nerul in Navi Mumbai by a private developer has sparked outrage among environmentalists and residents. The area, which falls under the Coastal Regulation Zone and is under the City and Industrial Development Corporation of Maharashtra (Cidco) is home to a diverse ecosystem, including flamingos, jackals, and mongooses.

As the trees were cut without necessary approvals, environmentalists met Forest Minister Ganesh Naik on Tuesday and urged the government to hand over the land to the Forest Department. Naik promised to look into the matter and hold the officials responsible.

On Monday, residents and activists lodged a complaint with the Forest Department against the illegal tree cutting following which Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) Deepak Khade and Range Forest Officer (RFO) Sudhir Manjare from the Mangrove Cell visited the site. The Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation (NMMC) officials who reached the spot have seized the machinery used for deforestation.

Authorities confirmed that planning agency Cidco had auctioned three large plots in the sector under its Integrated Township Scheme (ITS), and allowed the developer to acquire land and chop mangroves. However, residents claimed that no approval was taken from the Bombay High Court, mandatory for any construction in a mangrove buffer zone. They argued that since the area is covered with dense forest and mangroves, it should have been transferred to the Forest Department for conservation instead of being sold for construction.