

Mangroves Destroyed: 150 Cases But No Conviction in 12 Months

Badri Chatterjee

As unabated destruction of mangroves continues across Maharashtra, authorities have failed to rein in offenders. Statistics reveal that there hasn't been a single conviction in 150 cases in the past one year, and inquiry in more than 33% cases is still pending.

As per data available with the Konkan divisional commissioner's office, more than 50 cases of mangrove destruction between July 2015 and August 2016 remain pending. Of these, 22 cases were from suburban Mumbai, 12 from Thane, nine from Navi Mumbai, five cases from Mira-Bhayander and the remaining from Sindhudurg and Raigad districts. Moreover, fewer than 10 first information report (FIR) were filed against offenders in the Konkan region.

HT had reported on May 25 that since the inception of the state mangrove cell in 2012, only seven criminal cases were registered against offenders. As per the data available with the cell, not a single person has been convicted in the 115 cases registered under various sections.

"We have been consistently raising the issue of pending cases in our monthly meetings with all the district collectors in the Konkan region. They have said that constant follow-ups are being done in every case," said Bhausahab Dangade, Konkan deputy commissioner (revenue). "We will take up the matter in our next meeting on Saturday and direct district collectors to submit individual reports on all the pending cases at their earliest."

He added that 80% of the cases pertaining mangrove destruction are related to dumping of garbage, construction debris and encroachment. "Remaining cases include to local bodies levelling land after clearing encroachments, which leads to destruction of mangroves. However, there are hardly any cases of hacking or burning of mangroves," Dangade said.

Officials from the Mumbai suburban collectorate said the inquiry in all the pending cases will be completed by the first week of September. "We had a special meeting with Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) officials, and we gave them a list of pending cases related to debris dumping. After removing debris from each location, we requested the BMC to make details available on its website," said Deependra Singh Kushwah, collector, Mumbai suburban.

"There are several cases, which haven't been documented officially. There are over 200 cases in the past one year. We have concrete evidence that despite more than 15 FIRs being filed in Mira-Bhayander, illegal constructions were completed," Stalin Dayanand, project director of NGO Vanashakti

HC orders that fell on deaf ears

January 2016: A Bombay high court bench of Justices VM Kanade and Revati Mohite Dere stated that the wetlands have to be strictly protected. ‘(R)ampant destruction is continuing to take place in all such areas as mentioned in the contempt petition,’ the bench said

March 2014 : A division bench of Justices VM Kanade and Justice Anil Menon imposed an interim ban on reclamation and construction in wetland areas across Maharashtra

December 2013: The state government, following directives issued by the high court, asked to all civic bodies to enforce a ban on reclamation or construction on wetlands.

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