

PMC accused of cutting trees without permission

Neha.Madan@timesgroup.com

Pune: Citizens on Monday accused the civic body of starting tree-felling activities, as a part of the riverfront development project, even before getting the mandatory permission from the state tree authority.

Mukund Mavalankar, a renewable energy and forest restoration expert, told TOI: “The riverfront development project work has already begun on stretches 9, 10 and 11. The entire project has 11 stretches. Stretch 9 begins at Sangam Bridge and continues up to the Bund Garden Bridge. On both sides, work has started. As many as 95 trees have already been chopped on the left bank of the river. This was done without permission from the state tree authority. The trees have simply disappeared.”

Mavalankar said when citizens had approached the officials of the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) for an answer, they were told that 35 trees had been chopped while 60 had been replanted in another area. “However, the rules mandate that the replantation must be done in the same area. Also, cutting any tree on the stretch is illegal till formal permission is acquired from state authorities. If any project involves cutting of more than 200 trees, the permission must be taken from the Maharashtra tree authority, without which the trees cannot be chopped,” he added.

SEVERAL OBJECTIONS

Earlier this month, environmentalists objected to the PMC’s proposed riverfront development project (RFD)

➤ They said the civic body should focus on reviving the river instead of spending money on construction along the Mula-Mutha riverbank

➤ Environmentalists said the project will go on to reduce the width of the river

➤ It will adversely impact the Mula-Mutha’s carrying capacity and lead to floods in the city

➤ The objections were raised during the first public hearing organised by PMC to discuss the proposed cutting of trees for the project

➤ Reports have stated that PMC plans to chop at least 6,000 trees for the project

➤ Citizens said that no tree-cutting should be allowed

➤ Citizens also objected to the presence of a private project consultant who had joined PMC officials on the panel for the hearing

A resident of Pashan, told TOI, “When we visited the site to verify the 95 trees — as per PMC docket number 745 dated February 16, 2023, by the Yerawada-Kalas-Dhanori Zonal office of PMC (Zone I) — we could not find them. This means the trees have been illegally cut by the civic body for the riverfront development project without prior approval and permission from the tree authority, the Government of Maharashtra. We have lodged a grievance with the PMC, seeking a proper police panchanama and punishment for those responsible for illegally cutting 95 trees on the stretch.”

Environment activist Sarang Yadwadkar said, “Tree cutting on the riverbed is not only illegal but also unethical. In the DPR, not just once, but repeatedly, the PMC has said that it is going to protect

the existing trees along the river. Moreover, environmental clearance was accorded to this project on the condition that not a single tree will be cut. It also was never communicated to anyone that trees would be chopped for this project. Citizens were kept in the dark in this aspect. In fact, PMC has already started killing the trees by burying them under debris along with the birds and their nests on them. This is an act of cruelty.”

A senior PMC official, however, denied that any trees have been chopped under the riverfront development project so far. “The public hearing was conducted last week and the proposal will be sent to the state tree authority. Before getting the requisite permission, no trees can be cut under the riverfront development project,” he said.