

'Don't allow constructions at Yeoor'

RESIDENTS PROTEST Wall built by developer has blocked the road to Jambhulpada and Patonepada, allege activists

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THANE: In the past four months, 50 trees in Yeoor forest have been felled and builders have encroached on government lands and are slowly destroying the city's green lung.

Alleging that even residents are getting affected by illegal constructions in the forest area, protesters marched from Patonepada to the Thane collector's office on Friday, demanding the preservation of the green area.

Hundreds of residents, citizens and activists protested against the illegal encroachment and destruction of Yeoor forest lands for building hotels, resorts and other commercial structures. "More than 50 trees have already been felled and over 200 trucks have dumped rubble on the forest soil, irreversibly damaging the fragile ecosystem of the Yeoor forest," said Rohit Joshi, one of the organisers of the rally.

The protest was organised by the Yeoor Environmental Society and a union of volunteers working for the development of tribals and other backward communities.

Ramesh Walvi, 28, whose family has been living in Yeoor forest for more than 50 years, said all residents have been affected by the rampant construction and destruction of greenery. "The illegal compound walls have blocked the traditional pathways to our houses. Children are unable to go to school, women are unable to access the common toilet area and villagers are unable to enter the forest which is the main source of livelihood for many," said Walvi.

He said: "The compound wall has blocked the road to Jambhulpada and Patonpada where 700 adivasis live."

The protesters blamed developer, Super Dream Real Estate, for illegally encroaching and constructing on forest land.

Joshi said the National Green Tribunal passed an order on January 13 that no construction work be allowed in Yeoor forest, but no action has been taken to

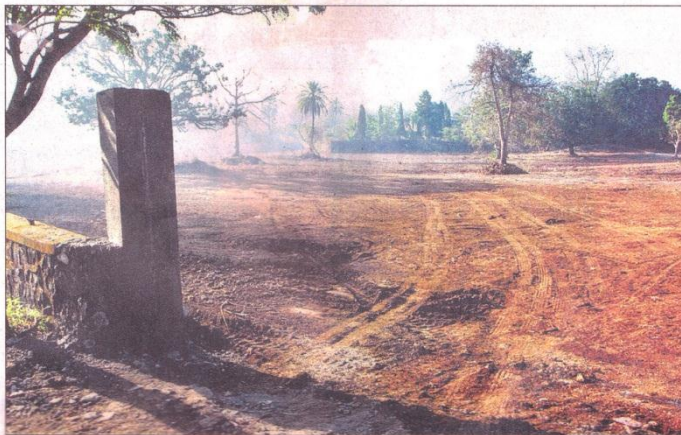


Residents and activists take out a march from Patonepada, Yeoor, to the collector's office at Court Naka on Friday. PHOTOS: PRAFUL GANGURDE

stop the work. "On January 11, the collector ordered her officials to demolish the construction. However, no action has been taken so far," Joshi added.

A forest official, on condition of anonymity, said: "We conducted a survey and gave a notice to the developer, asking him to remove the construction. But, the developer approached the high court and gave evidence that the land is his. So, the construction work has started."

Developer Suresh Gada of Super Dream Real Estate has denied all charges. "I have records to prove that the land belongs to me. Twenty years ago, I gave 60 feet land for road access to Patonpada for free. As per 7/12 records, we are the owner. The high court has given me permission for construction. The locals were using the pathway on my land as a shortcut to their houses," said Gada.



Construction work has started on the plot at Yeoor forest, shutting the traditional pathway of villagers living in the area. The builder said he has got documents to show it is his land.

ABOUT YEOR

60% of the total area of Sanjay Gandhi National Park is in Thane district (Yeoor, Tungreshwar and Nagala forest). The world's smallest butterfly, grass jewel and the world's largest butterfly atlas moth are both found in this forest.

1100 species of plants (including medicinal herbs) are found in the forest

More than **251** species of birds including Grey Hornbill, Darter, Peacocks, Jungle Fowl, Partridges, Shikras, Eagle and vulture

Species of reptiles, monitor lizard, cobra, viper snake, common krake, coral snake, Indian rock python

About **45** species of mammals like leopards, Sambar, spotted deer, black naped hair, palm civet, Barking Deer, Chital, Mouse Deer, Porcupine, Tarantula, Rehus monkey, Bonnet Monkey, bounet macaque, Indian flying fox and Langur.

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SURESH GADA, developer