

Forest dept to install Rs 120 crore CCTV system to watch over mangroves in MMR

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MUMBAI: Environmentalists' demand to get a CCTV camera surveillance for mangroves will soon be met with the state forest department floating tender for a Rs 120 crore high-tech CCTV network to cover the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) from Dahisar to Panje wetland and Colaba to Panvel.

With 669 cameras and a centralised monitoring system, the video surveillance will cover 195 "sensitive" mangrove zones in zones such as - Mumbai, Thane, Bhiwandi, Navi Mumbai, Panvel and Uran.

Mangrove Cell head S V Ramarao said that this CCTV project will not only to ensure safety and security of mangrove areas but will instil confidence among the citizens that the environment of the

city is being protected and nurtured.

The network will have Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) system, integrated with the data of VAAHAN Sarathi as well as databases of Passport, Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems (CCTNS), Prisons, and Automated Multimodal Biometric Identification System (AMBIS).

The State Mangrove Cell under the Forest Department floated a request for proposal (RFP) on Wednesday and the e-tenders will close on September 24.

The tenders will be opened on October 15. The surveillance network should be up and running in less than a year if everything goes as planned, a top official said.

NatConnect Foundation director B N Kumar who has been actively campaigning for over five years for saving the mangroves and CCTV surveillance, centralised control room along with a rapid action force, expressed his happiness that the government has begun to act at last.

Mangroves and wetlands have been under attack by debris and land mafias threatening the city's environment, Kumar pointed out.

Vast stretches of the sea plants are still under government agencies such as CIDCO and JNPA, while the mangroves on lands allotted to Navi Mumbai Integrated Industrial Authority (erstwhile NMSEZ) are yet to be accounted for, NatConnect said. Mangrove destruction in these areas goes on unabated, Kumar said.

Green activist Nandakumar Pawar who heads Sagar Shakti, said he is happy that the CCTV network will cover Panje wetland. The list of proposed CCTV points includes "Panje wetland entry" which means an official stamp of wetland on the 289-hectare inter-tidal water body, Pawar said.

Activist Jyoti Nadkarni said several mangrove zones in areas such Kharghar needed to get the protective cover. Mangroves and wetlands which support biodiversity are constantly under attack and unfortunately CIDCO is yet to hand them over to the forest department in violation of the High Court order.

The proposed network with night vision cameras will track illegal movements by people and vehicles that can inflict damage to life and property of the mangrove areas and their livelihood.

The mangrove cell will also have a Central Control Room, Zonal Recording Station, Storage Backup Station and Zonal Viewing Centre.