

Nature lovers sign petition to save Mattewara forest

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As the state government has proposed to set up a modern industrial park near the Mattewara forest and the Sutlej, environmental activists, various organisations and a number of residents of villages of nearby areas have been opposing the government's decision for a long time.

Now, a city-based industrialist, writer and an activist, Ranjodh Singh, has started an online petition, 'Save Mattewara Forest', on Change.org and made an appeal to the environmentalists and nature lovers to come forward to save the forest as well as the river. The online petition is being shared on various social media platforms to create a mass movement to protect the natural habitat of Mattewara and the Sutlej.

In the petition, Ranjodh stated that: "Since the Covid pandemic, which began last year around March, there were consistent lockdown and slowdown in all activities. However, the state government took a hasty decision in the Cabinet without any discussion to go ahead with the development of around 950- acre industrial park in the vicinity of the Mattewara Forest reserve and the Sutlej banks, near the flood-prone Dhussi embankment."

The government has acquired land from panchayats of Sekhowal and a few adjoining villages for the project. Many residents of the villages have also opposed the government's move.

While sharing his concern, Ranjodh Singh stated: "The Mattewara forest is spread over more than 4,000 acres of natural reserves, housing several varieties of flora and fauna. It is the oxygen factory for the entire Ludhiana and a habitat for animals and birds, including neel gai, peacocks, monkeys, wild boars, deers and serpent varieties. The nearby Botanical and Butterfly Garden is known for exotic varieties of butterflies and insects. If an Industrial zone comes up in the area, whole ecological balance will get ruined in the due course of time."

"To oppose the haphazard development and save the Mattewara forest area, a public action committee has been fighting a battle to protect the forest and the river," he said.

Meanwhile, over 325 persons have signed the petition within a short time after it was published, raising their voices to save the forest and the river. More people are being appealed to join the petition.

While giving a reason for signing the petition, Mahinder Singh Sekhon stated: "I fully support and stand by the petition. What is being done is ecocide! And I strongly oppose this."

Nandini Deshmukh stated: "I want natural ecosystems to sustain. It is essential for the survival of mankind."

Another supporter Kiran Gupta commented: "The Mattewara forest is the lungs of Ludhiana city, lungs damaged means poor health of city and residents. If lungs stop working, no life."

Maninder Singh has stated: "We need forests more than the industry."

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