

Sewage flows into Ghaziabad forest, none to take care of trees here

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GAZIABAD: Lush jamun, banyan, kanakgandha, amaltas and neem trees spread over a 200-acre forest crisscrossed by quaint walking trails and sporadic faded thatched huts for walkers to take rest — sitting just across the Hindon banks, Sai Upvan often referred to as the Ghaziabad's "green lung" has long countered the city's carbon output and provided scores of walkers a green oasis of calm amid the hub drub of the industrial city. Initially a vast agricultural land, the municipal corporation earmarked the area as a 'city forest' around 2001. It boasted of 2.5 lakh trees of various varieties and those with medicinal properties.

Fast forward to 2024, the green area lies submerged in a thick five-to-six-foot layer of slime and sewage water. The remaining area is strewn with rotting garbage. A pungent odour hangs over the area. People living nearby say parts of the forest, especially areas near the Mahamaya stadium, are a breeding ground for flies, mosquitoes and other insects.

Green activists said around 2008, a drain that meanders through the forest started to overflow and, in the absence of any other outlet, sewage water started gushing directly into the forest. In a matter of months, it destroyed trees on at least 32 acres.

In 2009, the civic corporation also began dumping truckloads of solid waste inside the forest along the railway tracks that pass from the rear of the Sai Upvan. Rajendra Tyagi, a former councillor, said thousands of trees in a

forest patch started dying a slow death because of the negligence of the very civic agency that had once helped create it painstakingly.

Tyagi, who filed a PIL in the Allahabad HC in 2012 to save Sai Upvan, said on Oct 11, 2012, the high court directed the civic authorities to concretise the sewer flowing through the city forest and ensure sewage water did not overflow and destroy the greenery. The HC also directed that a sewage treatment plant (STP) should be constructed to prevent untreated waste from polluting the Hindon.

“That was 12 years ago. Till now, nothing much has changed on the ground. The sewer continues to spill wastewater into the green patch, especially during the monsoon, before emptying into the Hindon. There is no sign of any STP here,” Tyagi said.

The only thing that the GMC did was to develop an Eco Park in 2018, put up some benches here and there, and create a walking trail at a cost of Rs 4.5 crore in the Sai Upvan area. “But the Eco Park did not serve its purpose. Within no time it became a den of local miscreants and addicts, scaring away the very few visitors it had,” Tyagi added.

On July 15, Tyagi had written to UP’s principal chief conservator of forests, saying hundreds of trees and vegetation have been affected because of sheer negligence in the past few years despite the high court order.

In a letter dated July 27, the ministry of environment, forest and climate change sought an action taken report about the alleged degradation at the 200-acre land after a resident lodged a complaint. “Kindly examine the matter and take appropriate necessary action as per the provisions of extant Acts, Rules and Regulations in force. An action taken report in this regard may kindly be communicated to this Ministry and the applicant at the earliest,” the letter states.

Virendra Kumar Daksh, a resident of Raj Nagar Extension, said, “For a city that has very few parks, Sai Upvan was a

green lung. But we can no longer call it so. Everywhere you will find plastic waste. The putrid smell from the drain makes it a no-go zone. Not many visit this park now," he said.

A senior Ghaziabad municipal corporation official said they will look into the matter.