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THE TIMES OF INDIA

Turahalli forest fire raises biodiversity concerns

TNN | Mar 29, 2021, 08.44 AM IST



BENGALURU: Wildfires were reported in Turahalli forest on the outskirts of Bengaluru on Saturday night — the fourth blaze in a span of one month, totally gutting 11 acres of forest area.

Abdul Aleem, president, Changemakers of Kanakapura Road, said: “We are not sure to what extent the fire has damaged the forest. But considering there are so many species of birds, the biodiversity of the forest has surely been impacted.”

He further added: “It has been over a month since more than 4,000 residents hit the road demanding Turahalli forest be protected by putting up a fence, installing CCTV cameras and increasing the number of guards.

The forest department has failed to provide these facilities, leading to incidents like this.”

Residents said dousing the flames was a Herculean task because the forest has no peripheral roads through which fire tenders could move in.

Soumya Kashyap, a member of Clean Up Turahalli, said, “I have been residing close to the forest for nearly six years. Every summer, we face this situation but we all know the fire does not occur naturally. Last year, we didn’t see any blaze due to the lockdown. We expect the authorities to add CCTVs and at least plan a peripheral road that can prove helpful during such emergencies.”

Residents fear that with two more months of summer left, more such fires are possible.

Range forest officer Gopal AA agreed that the fire was man-made and not natural. “We have filed an FIR but all we know at the moment is that it is man-made. We have increased the number of guards on night duty from two to three and are awaiting more details,” he said.

Burnt body found

Following Saturday’s forest fire, Talaghattapura police on Sunday afternoon discovered the burnt body of a man near Gowdanapalya close to the affected area.

Police sources said they are yet to identify the dead man, but that he appeared to be 30-35 years old. There were signs of fire at the place where the body was found.

“Fire-fighters doused the flames on Sunday. When officials were about to enter the forest to check loss of habitat, they noticed the body in a drain. We have sent it for postmortem. It appears the person got burnt in the fire,” sources said.