

Bamboo units working sans nod in Gorewada

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NAGPUR: The Forest Development Corporation of Maharashtra (FDCM), which is executing the international zoo project, had shifted the safari plan to the southern side from the north because the Gorewada lake supplying drinking water to the city would have been polluted.

On the other hand, the Maharashtra Bamboo Development Board (MBDB) has taken up construction of industrial units to treat bamboo in reserve forest without mandatory permissions.

On Tuesday, 4-5 workers on the job at the vacuum pressure impregnation unit had a miraculous escape after a blast due to a technical snag in the automatic bamboo treatment machine. Heavy steel nut-bolts were broken

into pieces and flew past the workers like bullets. The workers were not wearing any safety gear.

After TOI report, FDCM officials did a spot panchnama but workers tried to downplay the incident.

“MBDB is using copper chrome boron to treat bamboo and also extracting charcoal and oil from its waste. All this involves chemical processes which is prohibited in the green zone. The pollutants are feared to be discharged in the perennial nullah followed by lake water, threatening flora and fauna and rich biodiversity in the forest,” said senior FDCM officials.

As per the MoEFCC guidelines, setting up industrial units is a non-forestry activity and hence a violation of the Forest Conservation Act.

Even as the managing directors of MBDB, FDCM and PCCF (HoFF) are tight-lipped on the issue and did not respond to calls even on the second day, TOI has found that MBDB units are operating in violation of MoU between FDCM and MBDB signed on February 15, 2020.

Principal secretary (forest) Milind Mhaikar said, “I will look into the matter.” In November 2011, FDCM was handed over 1,914-hectare forest vide a GR. Out of this area, why was the 31.5-hectare area allocated to MBDB without asking the state government?

The MoU clearly puts the onus of violation of Forest Conservation Act (FCA), 1980, on the bamboo board. The agreement also doesn't make any mention of setting up of units in the reserve forest. Yet, one bamboo treatment unit has been set up, and work on another is going on.

Besides, one more unit to extract oil and charcoal from bamboo waste is in place. Setting up of these units needs permission from the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board (MPCB) & Directorate of Industrial Safety & Health.

Hema Deshpande, a sub-regional officer of MPCB, said, “We did not receive any application from MBDB for setting up these units. This is a serious matter and action will be taken.”

Earlier, despite opposition from FDCM officials, 31.5 hectares of reserve forest land in compartment number 795 was allotted to MBDB by the PCCF on December 12, 2019. The MoU states that activities undertaken will be for habitat development, soil and water conservation works only and no constructions should be undertaken.

Besides, it is also not sure whether the MBDB followed mandatory BIS codes. “The board should also come clear whether the identification of isolated storage and importer of hazardous chemicals under manufacturing, storage, and import handling rules 1989 (amended in 2000), were adhered to,” said bamboo experts.

