

Delhi forest department to resurrect over 30 trees buried alive

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NEW DELHI: The evidence now lies in the open, like incriminating proof in mass graves. Suspecting that the Rail Land Development Authority (RLDA) had disregarded norms related to tree felling in its project at Bijwasan, Delhi government's forest department has been digging at a spot in Dwarka to unearth the truth.

Over 60 trees have indeed been found buried under soil and sand. Thankfully, some appear to have survived and the foresters have begun the task of standing them upright to ensure their revival.

A forest official confirmed, "We have found more than 60 trees buried under a mound of soil. Of these, nearly 30 fully grown trees seem to be alive suggesting that they might not have been buried too long ago. We have started replanting these trees at the site, providing them support and

manure and water. We feel some of these trees can be saved."

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In an unusual step, the forest department had started digging on Thursday to ascertain if trees had been chopped down when RLDA was undertaking the Bijwasan rail redevelopment project there. The initial report of the forest department said 131 trees were felled, pruned and damaged in violation of the Delhi Preservation of Trees Act, 1994, but RLDA denied the allegations.

The excavation began essentially to find the roots at the spot as evidence of the tree felling.

A notice sent by the west forest division to RLDA on May 26 after the first day of digging read, “On the first day of the inspection, it is reported by the forest officials deployed at the alleged site that most of the trees are sheesham and desi kikar, which can be rehabilitated by taking necessary steps. You are directed to remove the dumped soil and sand from the alleged site within one week of issuance of this notice to create an ideal condition for rehabilitating the buried adult trees.”



On Saturday, a forest official said, “We have no plans to demolish the structures put up by RLDA there. But after the excavation

is complete, we will assess the damage caused to trees and take appropriate action against RLDA under the law, including imposition of penalties.”

However, an RLDA official refuted the allegations. “The project was awarded to RLDA in December 2021 and no tree was felled. We are not aware if any tree was chopped down earlier.” The official added, “The project was initially given to the Indian Railway Stations Development Corporation, but with that company’s dissolution last October, the project was awarded to RLDA.”

The matter came to light when local residents Naveen Solanki and Himanshu Saini lodged a complaint with the civic authorities in January claiming that over 100 trees were chopped down without permission. During the hearing, the forest department claimed RLDA hadn’t joined the investigation in the manner laid down by law.