

JNPT, MMRDA to transfer 1,014 hectares of mangroves to forest department

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Mumbai: The Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT) in Raigad district, India's largest shipping container terminal, and the Mumbai Metropolitan Regional Development Authority (MMRDA) have agreed to handover 1,014 hectares of mangroves to the state forest department for safekeeping, pursuant to an order of the Bombay High Court (HC) dating back 16 years.

On Monday, environment minister Aaditya Thackeray tweeted, "In our review meeting today, JNPT has agreed to hand over 815 hectares of its land to the Forest Dept as mangroves, while MMRDA will hand over 199 ha of land."

His tweet further read, "Over the last 2 years, our regular meetings with Forest Dept and mangrove cell has got more than 11,000 ha of land under the protection of the Indian Forest Act officially."

With this latest transfer of mangroves by JNPT and MMRDA, about 2,000 hectares of mangroves on government land are remaining to be handed over, with a major chunk of about 1,400 hectares being in Vasai-Virar municipal limits and another 800 or so hectares scattered across other bodies including the Navi Mumbai Integrated Industrial Area near JNPT, officials with the forest department's mangrove cell confirmed.

Environmentalists pointed out that JNPT is still to account for nearly 100 hectares of mangroves on its Nhava Sheva property, having previously admitted under the Right to Information (RIT) Act that the extent of mangroves on the port premises amounts to 913 hectares in 2006, at the time of the Bombay High Court order calling for the protection of all mangroves across the state.

"It's very clear that about 100 ha, equivalent to the size of ten Azad Maidan, is yet to be handed over. The government must immediately ask JNPT to give an account of this area and transfer the land in compliance with HC directions," said BN Kumar, Navi Mumbai-based environmentalist.

Previously, JNPT has been penalised by the HC-appointed mangrove protection and conservation committee for destroying at least 4,500 mangroves to make way for its container terminal-4 port expansion project.

Unmesh Wagh, deputy chairman, JNPT, said, "We commissioned a remote sensing exercise to identify how many mangroves are there on our land as of date. The entire amount is being transferred because we are committed to protecting the environment." Asked to clarify the discrepancy of about 100 hectares of mangroves, Wagh said, "I do not have the exact figures with me at the moment, but JNPT is responsible for a very small fraction of mangrove reclamation in the area. Most of the mangroves which have been lost are due to expansion of villages, and not port expansion."

On February 22, the City and Industrial Development Corporation (CIDCO) transferred 68.4 hectares of mangrove forest area in Navi Mumbai's Panvel taluka to the forest department.

In August 2021, CIDCO handed over about 281 hectares of mangroves forests under its jurisdiction to the forest department. In 2021, a total of 1,810 hectares of mangrove land under the custody of various state-run bodies were handed over for safekeeping by the Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation, the Mira-Bhayander Municipal Corporation, and CIDCO.

Source: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/mumbai-news/jnpt-mmrd-to-transfer-1-014-hectares-of-mangroves-to-forest-department-101650294145932.html>