





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NGT fines development authority Rs25 lakh for environmental damage


VIRAT A SINGH | Sat, 4 Jun 2016-06:30am · dna

With the National Green Tribunal (NGT) imposing a fine of Rs25 lakh as environmental compensation on the Mumbai Metropolitan Regional Development Authority (MMRDA) and rapping it for causing environment degradation, activists and experts have claimed that finally all of MMRDA's lies and its "so-called development" of Mithi stands exposed.

The judgment comes in the wake of the petition filed by Jalbiradari and Vanashakti against the MMRDA, challenging the coastal regulation zone clearance for constructing retaining walls as well as destruction of mangroves.



The petitioners had also voiced against the blasting operation being carried out in the river.

In his order dated May 31, NGT chairman justice Swatanter Kumar said the MMRDA had started the project without compliance of the relevant provisions of law, causing environmental degradation, and even the blasting work was carried in violation to the relevant laws in force.

"State Environmental Impact Assessment Authority (SEIAA) shall nominate a member of National Environmental Engineering Research Institute as a member of the SEIAA, who would examine the entire matter and submit the final report to the Tribunal in terms of the judgment within three months," states the order, adding that SEIAA shall consider the project as it exists as on today and also give the amount to be imposed on the MMRDA for its defaults, violations and for damaging the environment, ecology and biodiversity of Mithi river and its surroundings.

The SEIAA has also been given the power to direct if any part of the project requires to be demolished in the interest of environment and ecology. "The SEIAA shall ensure that the creek of Mithi river at the discharge point is duly protected. Because of the 23 construction or any other reason, the flow of Mithi should not be adversely affected, and it shall also compute environmental, ecological and other damage caused by the project and the remedial steps required to be taken," mentions the report.

Environmental activist Rishi Agarwal said, "In my view, the courts have to set up an inquiry that will produce a comprehensive report of all the events and decisions taken post the 26/7 floods. Such an inquiry should not just look into environmental impacts, but also the various expenditures done in the name of flood control."

Agarwal had played a key role in organising Mithi Yatra in January 2009, where they raised several issues pertaining to the walls that at some places were almost 25 feet below the ground.

He went on to demand that courts establish punitive action to be taken against specific officials if wrongdoing is ascertained.

Director (projects) for Vanashakti Stalin D called it a landmark judgment and said that it proved how the MMRDA does not have any regard for the environment. "It now has a history of brazenly violating all the environmental rules, including Aarey. We now hope that the directives of the NGT are followed and the damage done fixed," he added.