

IN THE NEW ACADÉMIE SES-
SCHOOLS IS A POSSIBILITY IT USE
QUEEN ESCORT TO SHOW.

ALONG WITH AN VANDUICS AND HARVES.

300 trees make way for office, home

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THE little lake, once home to migratory birds, is slowly drying up. All around are stumps of freshly-cut trees. At a distance, bulldozers work. This is the Southern Ridge forest spread over Vasant Kunj, Vasant Vihar and Mahipalpur.

The Army is constructing homes and offices on this land which, it says, belongs to them. But an NGO, Citizens for the Preservation of Quarries and Lake Wilderness (CPQLW), claims that this land, part of the non-notified area of the Ridge, is being misused.

CPQLW's Dr Prof Vikram Soni alleges that over the last three days, bulldozers and workers have cut down over 300 trees. Pointing to a stump, he says it was a neem tree

MUSTAFA QURAIHI



Army says it owns the land, only undergrowth was cleared.

that served as a landmark. "Now there is only a jamun tree left. This water body used to attract migratory birds. I once saw a flock of Ba-Headed Geese, which had come from Siberia, Horned Owl as well as Spot-Billed ducks," says Soni. "The water body is

disappearing because the Army has been draining water out of it. Soon the birds will stop coming."

According to a labourer at the site, the bulldozers belong to Pooja Construction Company which is clearing the area for the Army. One of the workers says: "The

entire place was covered with trees a few months ago. The trees were cut and construction has started."

Another labourer adds that the stones stacked in different parts of the area are from the Ridge.

Soni says the area is designated as ridge by the Geological Survey of India. As per a Supreme Court judgement in 1996, this is a forest area "in which no infringement is permitted".

The Army, however, says it's following the Masterplan. According to Army spokesperson Col Anil Shourie, "This is Army land. Throughout the construction, we have followed the Masterplan of Delhi."

On allegations of trees being chopped, he says: "That was all undergrowth. We have an elaborate arboriculture plan. See the area in two years."

But the Forest department is not taking the Army's word. Deputy Conservator of Forests R.S. Prashant today surveyed the area to find out how many trees had been cut.

"According to the Delhi Tree Preservation Act, trees cannot be cut without the Forest Department's permission. We are trying to identify the contractor. We are also checking if the area belongs to the Army," Prashant said.

He added that no permission was sought. "We usually allow them to cut trees for up to a hectare. Beyond that, they need the Lt Governor's nod. It seems trees have been cut in more than 2-3 hectares," he said.

Ridge Management Board member Ajay Mahajan said: "Irrespective of ownership, Forest Department's permission is must."