

HINDU

# Army flayed for tampering the Ridge

By Our Staff Reporter

**NEW DELHI, MAY 16.** The Citizens for the Preservation of the Lakes and Quarries Wilderness, a group working for the conservation of the Ridge, has alleged that Armed Forces were carrying out construction on the South Central Ridge, in violation of the Supreme Court directive banning development on the Ridge.

Addressing a Press conference here over the weekend, Mr. Vikram Soni, member of the group, said the Army had been carrying out construction on over a 100 hectares of the protected area which is yet to be notified. The construction is going on in the Vasant Vihar, Vasant Vihar and Mahipalpur forest areas, which had been officially declared part of the Ridge by the Geological Survey of India.

The area was identified as de facto forest but a formal notification is yet to be issued. Until 1962, the area was part of reserved forest and was apparently handed over to the Army for carrying out exercises.

Columnist Kuldeep Nayyar, joined these environmentalists in their cause and wrote to the Defence Minister, Mr. George Fernandes about the violation and even raised the matter in Parlia-

ment. However, the reply he got was that the issue had been got examined and it was found that the area was outside the Ridge. Mr. Nayyar said he would now take up the matter with the Privileges Committee.

The area, being a part of the Ridge, enjoys statutory protection according to the Master Plan-2001 and hence no development is permitted. Mr. Soni said construction was on for a residential accommodation for the officers.

He said the construction had started in September 1998 and despite drawing the attention of the Defence Minister towards it, construction is on at an unbelievable pace.

The group is now impressing upon the Central and the Delhi Government to immediately notify the area so that construction can be stopped immediately. If this does not work, they would move the court once again.

It may be recalled that the Supreme Court had stalled construction of an international hotel project at Vasant Kunj on a PIL filed by the group.

In this case, Mr. Soni said the Delhi Forest Officer had said he had initiated prosecution against the Army for felling trees, which is banned in the Capital.