



SANJEEV VERMA/HT

The construction work on the ridge will continue.

Ridge compromise unacceptable

THE GOVERNMENT'S decision to allow the construction of malls and office complexes on a part of the Vasant Kunj ridge is a compromise that has gone beyond acceptable limits. Delhiites will have to pay heavily in the years to come, as it has set a bad precedent.

The ministry of environment and forests has accepted that this illegal and partial construction has been done on a protected area. But there is a rider. Since the construction work involves some investment by the builders, it should be treated as a fait accompli and only damage control (read imposition of fine) can be done. As a result, the ministry cannot do anything but allow the builders to construct the commercial complex. With the court sealing and demolishing illegal complexes on unprotected areas over the last year, allowing illegal construction on a protected resource area is puzzling.

The area in question is a part of the Aravalli ridge forest and geologically it

was formed by ancient quartzite that shows countless fractures of time and natural history.

Is the leniency towards the builders, who built illegally without mandatory environmental clearances and the Delhi Development Authority (DDA), which sold off protected ridge land in the first place, acceptable? The answer is an emphatic no. The piece of land is declared ridge by the Geological Survey of India and is protected under the Master Plan of Delhi. It is a forest protected by the Forest Act (1980). It is an exceptional water recharge area and has been declared notified by the Central Ground Water Authority in 1999 and declared a vital recharge area in 2004. The Environment Act (1986) also protects it. Though the expert committee found the construction to be illegal and on a protected area, it recommended only 'damage control' in its report submitted in the Supreme Court a few months back.

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