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THE TIMES OF INDIA

Builder at Gilbert Hill site receives stop-work notice

TNN | May 22, 2015, 02:51 AM IST

MUMBAI: Civic officials in Andheri (West) have issued a stop-work notice to builder Tajdin Maredia who is excavating Gilbert Hill. Municipal commissioner Ajoy Mehta took cognizance of Wednesday's TOI report on violations by Maredia's Cordcon Builders, which is constructing Sagar City complex through the hill. A similar notice was issued for "one part of one building" three months ago.

Given the unrelenting blows being struck into the 66-million-year-old hill, it is no surprise to see it raining rocks onto the settlement below. One of the rarest of rare volcanic rock formations in the world appears to be sending a distress signal before it crumbles to the ground. Like Malin and Uttarakhand, the first casualties of an ecological disaster will be the very inhabitants who have infringed its boundaries.

Residents of Atlantic Society in Sagar City are witnessing boulders crashing into the car park even as children play in the compound. Gilbert Hill is located inside the building compound. In fact, Atlantic does not have a running compound wall, Gilbert Hill is its wall. Its flower beds and car park are located a foot or two from the monument. Anticipating a landslide, residents built a tin shed, but it was no match for a series of rocks which crashed onto the vehicles below. The space is now cordoned off.

Jameela Tharola and Taj Khan of the residents' association admit that buyers paid no heed to the fragility of the mountain in their backyard. "The flats came cheap and are still priced below market rate," they said. Some residents have also booked flats in the upcoming buildings.

The ecosystem surrounding Gilbert Hill is driven by crime and the underworld. Slum dwellers pelted stones at MLA Ameet Satam when he began building a retaining wall to stop further construction. Unfamiliar men prevented the TOI photographer from taking pictures along construction sites.

"Gilbert Hill is a Grade-II heritage structure with no effective protection. Ideally it should be a protected monument under the Geological Survey of India or at least granted a higher status as Grade-I so that its setting in the surrounding 100 metres is regulated. We are missing the opportunity to protect it under the upcoming DP," says a conservationist.

Only the Gamdevi Durgamata temple atop the hill keeps the hill still standing as builders are afraid to cut under it.