



## MLA gets civic experts to look at crumbling Gilbert Hill

*Members of the visiting team said the hill is in a shambles*

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Restoration work of Gilbert Hill will finally commence as Ameet Satam, MLA from Andheri, has resolved to take up the issue with the BMC and the state government. On Tuesday, Satam invited architect and urban planner P K Das, consultant-advisor (heritage rehabilitation) Arup Sarbadhikary, and officials from the civic building proposals department for a visit to Gilbert Hill, to show them how the heritage monument is degenerating.

On May 13, dna described in a report how residents fear for life and property if Gilbert Hill crumbles, as big stones have started popping out and falling in their building compound with great force.

Satam said that Gilbert Hill being a distinct feature of Andheri cannot be ignored and left to crumble. "I asked the officials from the building proposal department to come and see the condition themselves, so they can convey our grievances to the ward office and higher authorities. There are a lot of cracks at various places on the hill, and experts need to assess how deep they are. Unless there is analysis, restoration is difficult. Various tests will have to be conducted by the experts to gauge the extent of degeneration, and then a strategy will have to worked out on the restoration," said Satam.

He added that there are two under-construction sites at the foothills and there is also a big pond to store water for construction. As such, there is seepage at the foundation of the hill, which posed danger to the monument. Meanwhile, residents staying in the societies around the hill precinct have been asked to safeguard themselves as much as possible.

P K Das, who was a part of the visiting team said the hill is in a shambles and the BMC and state authorities are to blame. "How can the authorities pass proposals sitting at a table without visiting the site, without realising that the plot where new development is taking place is on the slope or the foothills. This is callous and irresponsible attitude," said Das.

Das said the hill is flaking, large boulders and slates cling loosely, imperiling those staying nearby. "It is unfortunate that people are allowed to build multistorey buildings that touch the hill's foundation and penetrate it. Continuous excavation in the basement has shocked the structure, and led to cracking up over the years," said Das.

Das posed two key questions: How can the hill be held together, and how can the building in the hill precinct be safeguarded? "The authorities will have to take immediate steps to safeguard the residents, such as barricading a certain portion, restricting entry to avert mishaps, geo-tech studies to understand the condition of flaking," said Das.

Sarbadhikary said historically, Gilbert Hill was a very large hill extending up to the station area. But after all kinds of rampant development, only 10 percent of the hill remains, thanks to gradual excavation. The hill is exhausted by now, though listed as heritage. He said the enfeebled monument needs urgent attention.

"We cannot do anything now. But to stop further damage, it needs to be conserved, through rock bolting and jacketing from top to bottom, and not the other way around. Buildings in the precinct will have to use large screens, barricading and shields to avoid mishaps during monsoon," said Sarbadhikary, who is also a former member of the Mumbai Heritage Conservation Committee.

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