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Dumped debris hits Adyar Poonga hard

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Chennai, Aug. 10: The Rs 100 crore Adyar Poonga or the Adyar river eco-restoration project seems to be choking at its confluence with the Bay of Bengal.

High-rise buildings coming up on the banks of the river have dumped tonnes of construction debris, encroaching around two to five metres of the bank along a two-kilometre stretch at MRC Nagar, obstructing the free flow of water from the sea to the Poonga.

The water bodies in Adyar Poonga do not have a direct water source but for the receding seawater during high tide. The dumping of debris narrows down the waterway, preventing free flow of seawater into the eco-park.

“The original idea for preserving water in the park throughout the year was two-phased. During rains, we planned to divert the stormwater from the neighbouring areas into the park. In the dry season, the seawater would flow (during high tide) into the poonga through Adyar estuary and fill up the water bodies to provide year-round water and preserve the unique ecology of the region,” said an official involved in the restoration work.

But, the dumping of debris would eventually dry the poonga water bodies that would be fatal for the fragile ecology of the region, the official said.

Public works department authorities and officials of the Adyar Poonga Trust are fighting a battle with corporate giants to get them clean up their backyard, which happens to be the Adyar estuary.

“Until about a few weeks ago, hundreds of illegal tenements were constructed for workers at the building site who used the river as a public defecating ground besides encroaching upon the river. After a lot of struggle, we managed to bulldoze all those constructions,” said PWD assistant engineer Balamurugan.

Still, the debris, mostly concrete slabs, has been dumped up to around five feet from the riverbed, creating land that the workers use mainly as open toilet.

When contacted, Mr R. Jayakumar, administrative officer at Gamun International, the firm that is involved in the construction work, said, “Around 15 days ago, PWD authorities brought bulldozers and destroyed all the huts we set up. It is now up to them to clear the stuff. We have nothing to do beyond our fence.”

Hundreds of construction workers brought from other states continue to use the area as a toilet facility besides letting out sewage into the river.

“The construction company has to make arrangements for providing toilets and other facilities for its workers. If they don’t do it, we cannot expect the labourers to refrain from polluting the rivers,” a senior PWD official said on condition of anonymity.

Though well-wishers of the project continue their fight to restore the width and purity of the river, the deputy chief minister’s ambitious Adyar Poonga project could soon dry up unless something is done about it.