

Bid to kill Pitampura peepul, no one is owning up

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New Delhi: Delhi's green cover may be thriving but trees in residential colonies with hectic building activity are facing the axe. An environmentalist in Pitampura has alleged that his family has been traumatised by threats ever since he lodged a protest against the heavy pruning and, what's worse, girdling of an old peepul tree.

Anadish Pal, 45, has been protesting against the treatment meted out to a tree in an MCD park that happens to be behind a local councillor's residence in Vaishali, Pitampura. The councillor, Praveen Gupta, he alleges, wants the tree out of the way since it's close to his four-storey house that's under construction.

Pal has alleged that despite having permission only for getting a few branches cut (heavy pruning), the tree was girdled as is evident in the accompanying photograph. Girdling, which extends around much of the trunk's circumference, injures the bark. It destroys the tree's most vital membranes, the layers that conduct water and minerals from the roots to the leaves and return the food produced by the leaves to the rest of the tree. It's sure to kill a tree.

Pal, an environmentalist and inventor, says: "Girdling is not allowed on any tree in Delhi because it's certain to kill the tree. What's happening in this case is that all government departments are simply passing the buck. The onus here falls on the horticulture department of the MCD which first allowed pruning but could not prevent the girdling. I have been threatened for making the complaint," Pal told TOI.

He recalled that it was on April 19 that heavy pruning was undertaken on the tree by the civic body's horticulture department after they got permission from the forest department. But, he alleges, that further severe cutting of all branches was carried out during the intervening night of April 22-23. Pal then sent a complaint to the forest department and the horticulture department of the MCD.



In response, a letter was written by Nahar Singh, asst director (horticulture) , MCD, Rohini Zone, to the forest conservation officer regarding unauthorised deep cutting of all the peepul tree's branches. 'But the act of girdling was covered up,' claims Pal as it was not mentioned anywhere in the letter. TOI has a copy of the letter. The deep cut around the main trunk of the tree was clearly visible when TOI visited Vaishali Vatika where the tree stands on Thursday.

Pal alleges he received a death threat from a man outside his house who claimed to be a friend of Praveen Gupta. "I had to seek police help," he said. Gupta, who is a councillor from Narela, denied the allegations. "We had sought permission from MCD for felling of the tree that was inclined towards our house and posed a danger. MCD granted us permission through the conservator of forests for 'heavy pruning' of the tree. It was the MCD staff that undertook the pruning of the tree and I'm not aware of any girdling," he said. He also denied giving any threats to Anadish Pal and accused Pal, instead, of "personal vendetta".