

NGT orders closure of 350 polluting units in Taloja

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NAVI MUMBAI: The National Green Tribunal (NGT) on Wednesday brought huge relief to people living along the Kasadi river and Panvel creek by ordering immediate closure of 350 polluting industries in Navi Mumbai's Taloja MIDC area till further orders. The NGT's principal bench in Delhi also directed the Taloja MIDC Common Effluent Treatment Plant (CETP) managers to deposit Rs 5 crore as penalty in addition to the Rs 5 crore asked to be deposited last month for failing to contain pollution of the river.

Taloja, the most-polluting CETP in the state, has been categorised as a non-performing plant by the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board (MPCB). It has been recording very high levels of BOD (Biochemical oxygen demand) and COD (Chemical Oxygen Demand), which are wastewater

quality indicators. In fact, the BOD and COD levels recorded are over ten times the permissible limits. Incidentally, according to a recent Central Pollution Control Board study, Maharashtra has the most polluted rivers in the country.

A corporator from Panvel, Arvind Mhatre, had filed a petition with NGT last year pointing out the air, water and land pollution caused by MIDC units in the Taloja belt in Raigad district. The industries release their effluents to the CETP, which processes it and releases it to the creek. While leakages in pipelines to the CETP has polluted Kasadi, some units also released effluents directly into the river.

Reacting to the order, Mhatre said, "This is a big decision. A total of 350 chemical, fertiliser and other units will be closed."

Following his petition, when the NGT ordered inspections, samples of water from the CETP inlet and outlet were found to be

highly polluted. Last month, the NGT bench directed the CETP managers to commence work on upgrading the plant within a month.

Mhatre's counsel Chetan Nagare said, "The bench passed the order directing MPCB to close all polluting units today (Wednesday). A compliance report will have to be submitted before NGT. The case is posted for further hearing on Thursday."

A major reason for the poor performance of the CETP is that it's virtually nobody's child now. The state government and MPCB have been trying to get more funding from the units to upgrade the CETP. The MPCB had ordered takeover of the CETP by MIDC, but there've been delays in bid finalisation for selecting a partner to run the plant. As a result, the CETP is currently under an administrator deputed by the Panvel cooperative registrar's office. This has also stalled the upgrade of the CETP to expand its capacity.

CETP administrator BD Ahire said, "We are yet to receive the NGT order copy. Our plea for the earlier deposit of Rs 5 crore will be heard on Thursday." MPCB regional officer Dr AN Harshvardhan said, "We do not have the exact number of polluting industries on hand. Employees handling it have been transferred."

The industries and local officials said they are yet to get a copy of the order. Talaja Industries Association president Satish Shetty said, "TIA will go through the NGT order, then take its stand. We will not challenge but ask for relief and some time."