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# Encroachers close in on National Park

**Prashant Rangnekar** Posted: Jan 18, 2009 at 0104 hrs

**Mumbai** Authorities at Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) are facing fresh encroachment attempts, this time from its original inhabitants — the tribal population in and around the park.

Most of the encroachment has been in the Yeoor range, which covers half the 103 sq km of the park. Its area extends from Mulund-Thane and the entire stretch along the Ghodbunder road, which divides the park into two parts. A small part of the park on the other side of the creek is known as Nagla. It further connects to Tungareshwar sanctuary, where encroachment is taking place on a large scale.

The park already has its hands full with existing encroachments on its periphery. The forest department, in spite of a high court order, has not been able to clear them fully.

"This is a clear case of landgrabbing," said SGNP director P N Munde. A report has been submitted to the park authorities by P R Masurkar, Range Forest Officer (RFO), Yeoor range. According to the report, 50 fresh cases have been registered by the department against unidentified people trying to encroach over 15 hectares.

"The encroachment is near Kaman village in Nagla near the park," said V P Patil, Assistant Conservator of Forest (ACF). Kaman is the railway station on the Diva-Vasai rail route and the rail authorities have increased rail services connecting the central and western railway. So, the land prices in the area have risen. "Encroachers have resorted to deforestation of large forest tracts. They are setting forests on fire to clear the land," added Patil.

Some forest officials feel the new Forest Rights Act is partly responsible. "The tribal people here are aware of their rights and get support from some tribal organisations," said a senior forest official. "They first try to stake claim on the land on the pretext of the FRA and if we take action, they accuse us under the Atrocities Act that gives special treatment to them," said the official.

The FRA recognises forest rights of other traditional forest-dwellers provided at least three of their generations, prior to November 12, 2005, have primarily resided in and have depended on forest land for livelihood.