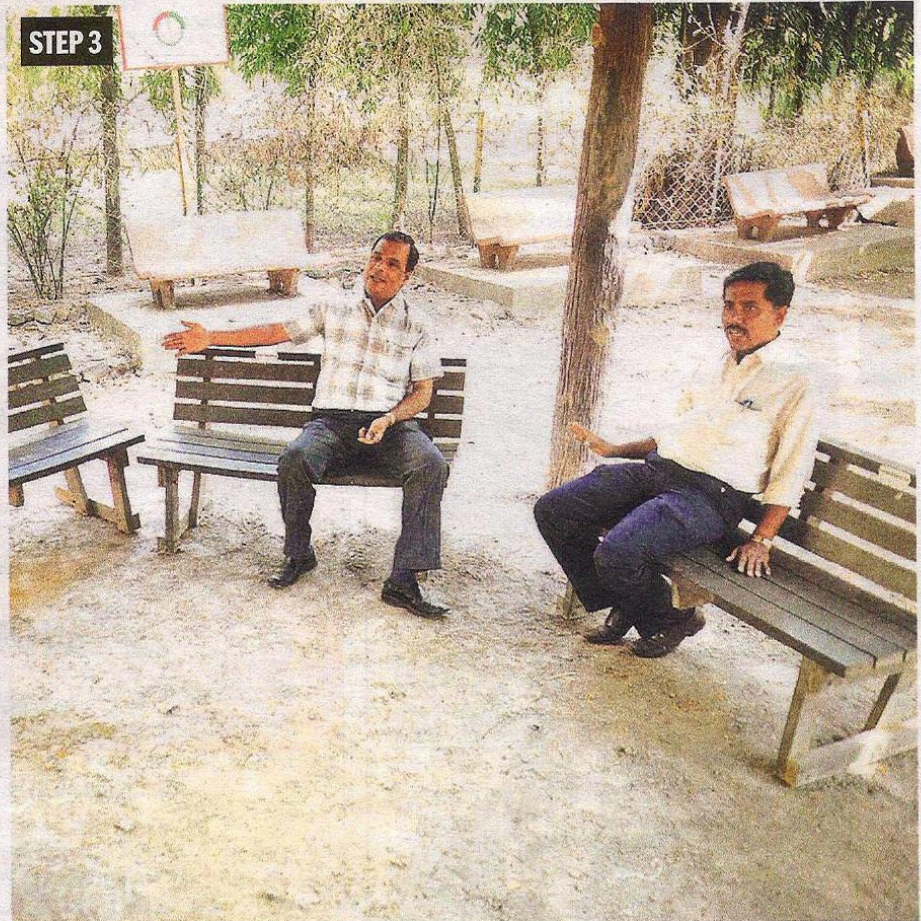


These benches are made of plastic bottles trashed at SGNP

The initiative will lead to eco-conservation and employment for tribals

PICS: NILESH WAIKAR



SGNP officials have set up a facility near the park's entrance to shred this waste, which is then sent to a set-up in Gujarat, where it is converted into planks

Virat A Singh
virat.singh@timesgroup.com

Don't be surprised if you find swanky new benches and cabins lining the Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP), instead of the usual plastic litter, soon. The Forest department officials have decided to recycle and turn the garbage thrown inside the park by callous visitors into articles of civic amenities.

"On an average, we end up collecting around 600kg plastic of waste from the park every month. It mainly consists of packaged drinking water bottles. With the help of Indian Centre for Plastics in the Environment (ICPE), we have set up a facility near the entrance of the park to shred this waste, which

will then be sent to a set-up in Gujarat. There, it will be converted into planks to make benches and other furniture items," said Range Forest Officer (RFO) TN Shinde. He added that the collected plastic waste would be shredded once a week.

Sunil Limaye, Chief Conservator of Forest and Field Director of SGNP, said that earlier as well, some of the waste was converted into durable and water-proof benches, which were set up inside the park as a pilot project.

"We think this initiative will help us send an eco-friendly message to the visitors. Plastic bottles collected by NGO and our staff members during clean-up drives require a huge storage space. So, to deal with all these problems in one go, we got a shredding machine set up on the occasion of World

Forestry Day, March 21. The plastic furniture will be made by local tribal members, providing them with employment opportunities as well," he said.

Apart from utilising the waste, forest officials are also trying to spread awareness by educating tourists against littering the park. They even collect a deposit of Rs 50-100 from visitors carrying plastic bottles and bags to dissuade them from littering.

"The deposit is refunded only if the visitors show the exact number of bags and bottles they were carrying, while on their way out," said SD Saste, Assistant Conservator of Forest (ACF).

TK Bandopadhyay, Technical manager of ICPE, said, "We have provided SGNP with a machine that can shred any solid plastic, and a manual compacter. We are also training their staff."