

## Despite outrage, K'taka CM asks Centre to reduce buffer zone of Bannerghatta Park

5-6 minutes

The Chief Minister's letter to the Centre, reasoning that the ecological sensitive zone will hamper developmental activities, has sparked outrage.



In a controversial move which has irked environmentalists in Bengaluru, Karnataka Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa in a letter to Union Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar has asked that the buffer zone of Bannerghatta National Park be reduced.

A letter dated February 1, written by Chief Minister Yediyurappa has surfaced among environmental activists and the same has been accessed by TNM.

The union government and the state government, in a joint meeting in 2018, had reportedly suggested a reduction of the ESZ by 100 sq km from the existing 268 km. Following this, campaigns were started by environmental activists stating that this change was proposed to benefit mining and real estate companies.

The letter by the Chief Minister also contradicts the stand taken by three BJP MPs — PC Mohan, Tejasvi Surya and Rajeev Chandrasekhar — who had also insisted that the full area of 268.96 sq km be retained as an eco-sensitive zone (ESZ). The three BJP MPs had also opposed previous state governments under Siddaramaiah and HD Kumaraswamy when they had proposed a similar reduction.

In his letter, Chief Minister Yediyurappa has reiterated that while Centre's draft notification was published on November 5, 2018, the same was endorsed in 2019 in a state-centre meeting during the 33rd ESZ Expert Committee meeting.

In his letter, he reasoned that the eco-sensitive zone will hamper developmental activities as it would require clearance from the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife and due to the status quo, many development projects around the national park have been halted.

The Supreme Court had issued guidelines prohibiting mining or industrial operations in an eco-sensitive zone since it can disturb wildlife and there are chances of man-animal conflict. The Karnataka High Court had, in 2018, ordered mining companies to stop illegal quarrying in the buffer zone and had issued steep fines.

Reacting to Yediyurappa's letter, environmentalist Vijay Nishanth, who previously has met former Environment Ministers for the same cause, said, "This exposes the duplicity of the BJP. How can the Chief Minister write this letter supporting the destruction of the forests when his own party MPs had taken a stand supporting our cause?"

He added, "We won't let this happen and will approach the courts required as it is a matter of saving Bengaluru city."

### **Importance of the eco-zone**

Many studies have shown that reducing the buffer zone of Bannerghatta will result in man-animal conflict. A study by leading scientist TV Ramachandra in 2015 had stated that the buffer zones in the area are biologically and hydrologically sensitive zones. Any attempts to mine in the area would mean that animals would not be able to move in their natural habitats, Ramachandra said.

A study by the Indian Institute of Human Settlements stated that the eco-sensitive zone was important in protecting Bengaluru city from becoming a heat island.

A study by wildlife biologist Sanjay Gubbi, in association with the Forest Department, had also found that there were more leopards in the area than what is usually found in a reserve area of similar sizes. One of the findings was that Bannerghatta's northwestern side is connected to 3,250 acres of deemed forests which include Gullalligudda, BM Kaaval, UM Kaaval and the Roerich Estate. Sanjay Gubbi recommended that 5,375 acres of wildlife formed by the connecting forests should be notified as a Conservation Reserve.

