'Don't alter draft order to reduce ESZ in W Ghats'





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PICTURESQUE: A view of Charmadi Ghats in the Western Ghats range in Karnataka. DH file photo.

Noting that the ecology of the Western Ghats was under serious stress, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) restrained six states falling in the region from giving environmental clearance to activities which may adversely affect the eco-sensitive areas.

The green panel allowed the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) to republish the draft notification of the Western Ghats that lapsed on August 26 and asked it to finalise the matter within six months without alterations to the eco-sensitive zone in terms of notification dated February 27, 2017.

A bench headed by NGT chairperson Justice Adarsh Kumar Goel slammed the states for the delay in filing objections with regard to the notification and said "delay on account of objections of states may not be conducive to the protection of the eco-sensitive areas".

The tribunal said the Western Ghats region is one of the richest biodiversity areas which needs to be conserved.

"In view of the fact that any alteration in the draft notification dated February 27, 2017 may seriously affect the environment and especially in view of recent incidents in Kerala, we direct that no changes be made to reduce the area of eco-sensitive zone in terms of notification, without the same being considered by this tribunal.

"As already directed vide order dated September 25, 2014, no environmental clearance be granted and no activity adversely impacting eco-sensitive areas be permitted in the area covered by draft notification dated till the matter is finalised," the bench said.

The order came after the MoEF in its affidavit told the bench that the earlier notification was republished on February 27, 2017 and was communicated to the states of the Western Ghats region for their views.

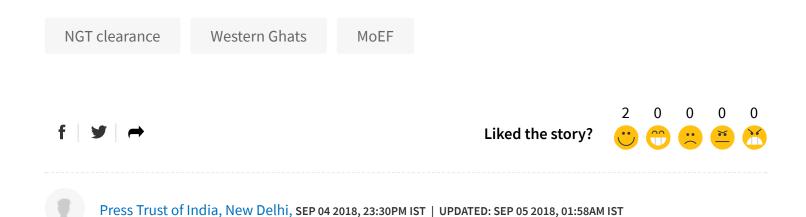
It said Karnataka raised objections seeking review of the prohibitory and regulatory regime

The ministry said the matter was delayed due to lack of response from some states and republication of the draft notification dated had become necessary.

The draft notification issued by the MoEF had identified area of 56,825 square kilometres spread across six states — Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu — as the Ecologically Sensitive Area.

Following protests by various groups and political parties against its recommendations, the government constituted the K Kasturirangan committee to examine the WGEEP report.

Instead of the total area of Western Ghats, only 37% (i.e. 60,000 sq km) of the total area be brought under ESA under Kasturirangan report stated.





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