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Despite pressure from greens, govt not keen on reviving Western Ghats Task Force

Bosky Khanna, Bengaluru: 17 Jan 2017, DHNS



The state government is not keen on constituting the Western Ghats Task Force (WGTF) even after the term of the first such panel ended four years ago. This is despite the demand for it from green activists and experts.

The previous BJP government had set up the task force in 2008. It functioned from 2009 to 2012 with Ananth Hegde Ashisara as chairman.

The committee had a vice-chairman, forest department officials and heads of other departments like bio-fuel and environment and forests.

Recently, the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) made a recommendation to revive the task force to manage the eco-sensitive hotspots better. Prof T V Ramachandra of the Centre for Ecological Sciences, IISc, has questioned decisions like implementing the Yettinahole project, stripping conservation status of Kappatadagudda forest and allowing hydel projects in elephant corridors.

But the government thinks otherwise. Forest, Environment and Ecology Minister B Ramanath Rai told DH that the government had no reservation on reviving the task force. He, however, said that the panel should not indulge in politics.

There was lot of opposition to the Kasturirangan committee and its recommendations. The same could repeat in case of WGTF also. That is the reason why we are not keen on it, the minister said. "The government does not have to pass an Act or formulate new rules to revive it. It just needs to appoint people. It was working under the forest department and acted as a link between the government and the people," said a senior forest official.

The government is giving away forest lands to SC/STs and tribal people in Raggihalli reserve forest and in Shivamogga and Uttara Kannada districts. This is one reason why the government didn't want to revive WGTF, the official said.

Ashisara said the recommendations made by WGTF were accepted by the MoEF like banning mining in forest areas and fencing the sacred groves which are a natural barrier against disasters like tsunami in the coast.

However, retired chief wildlife warden B K Singh, who also was a part of the WGTF, is against its revival.

"There are already too many boards and officials and the forest staff is compelled to answer all of them. It will be better if these committees are not formed," he said.