


[Home](#) > [States](#) > [Karnataka](#)

Protect Bannerghatta buffer zone from quarrying: Activists

By Meera Bhardwaj | Express News Service | Published: 18th March 2018 05:54 AM |

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BENGALURU: One of the last remaining lung spaces in Bengaluru, 1 Bannerghatta National Park (BNP), is in the thick of controversy with quarrying activity continuing in the buffer zone.

Environmentalists and urban conservationists are seeking an immediate notification of eco-sensitive zone (ESZ) around the park due to continuing quarrying in the buffer zone. Denying any such activity in ESZ area, the forest department says not even a single NoC has been issued in the last five years for quarrying, mining or any such activity

the 1 km buffer zone or ESZ of the park.

Sridhar Pabbisetty of Namma Bengaluru Foundation, said, “Rampant quarrying in the buffer zone around the national park thrives, which will cease once the notification is issued.”

Urban conservationist Vijay Nishanth said “The high decibel blasting and continuous quarrying damaged the delicate ecology around the park. Frequent truck movement on the elephant corridor caused huge distress to the environment. There have been cases of road kill while an illegal road been cut through BNP between Arohalli and Anekal.” They add, “It is shocking that mines and geology department and the state pollution control board have been keeping mum all these years despite a Karnataka High Court order to restrict and move out such activities to safe zones.”

Vijay Nishanth, Project Vruksha Foundation submitted a memorandum to Union Minister of Environment, Forest, Climate Change Harsha Vardan on Saturday and apprised him of all details. The minister promised to take suitable action.

Citing the research study taken up on the BNP buffer zone by the Energy and Wetlands Group, Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, they say, “The study has shown that mining and quarrying activities have to be phased out if the national park has to survive.

The study reveals how nearly 9,000 hectares in the ESZ has been encroached upon with the government doing nothing. Using satellite imagery, researchers have shown how good lands have been usurped by quarries, mines and housing settlements with the government turning a blind eye to the fact, huge tracts of moist deciduous forests have reduced from 50.4 to 28.5 per cent in the 5 km of buffer zone between 1973 and 2015. Even the revised draft ESZ of BNP submitted to the Centre shows a drastic cut. Now, it stretches from 100 metres to 4.5 km from the boundary of the Protected Area while the ESZ area has been reduced from 269 to 181.57 sqkm. The reduction in ESZ has already been questioned by the apex court,” they add.

A senior forest official said, “No such activities are taking place in the 1 km safe zone around the park. NoC for quarrying or mining is issued in the last 5 years around 1 km of the park or the ESZ. The quarries are in private lands which were given on lease (outside the 1 km area) between 1995-2005. They have been creating problems in the elephant corridor area and we have written umpteen letters to the mines and geology department to take action. But nothing has happened.

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