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Western Ghats Task Force opposes Gundia project

Staff Correspondent

MYSORE: The Western Ghats Task Force has opposed, in no uncertain terms, the 400-MW Gundia hydroelectric project planned in the heart of the Western Ghats.

Speaking to presspersons here earlier this week, task force chairman Ananth Hegde Ashisara said that the task force, an initiative of the State Government with the objective of conservation of the Western Ghats, had communicated its stand to the Government and stressed on the impact of the project on the environment and ecology of the ghats, especially the irreversible damage to biodiversity, in an interim report to the Government.

The Western Ghats is listed one of the 18 biodiversity hotspots in the world. The task force had made its stand on the proposed power projects in Hanakon and Tadadi in Uttar Kannada district clear to the Government. "It is mandatory for the Government to abide by the laws framed for the conservation of forests and the environment," he said.

Mr. Hegde said that the task force, which was formed a year ago, had succeeded in convincing the Government on the impact of the mining activities in the Western Ghats. "The Government, which has principally agreed to the stand of the task force, has not issued even a single permit for mining activity in the Western Ghats area in the last one year," he said.

On the steps taken to protect and improve forest wealth in the state, he said that the process of appointing 800 watchers had already begun and the Government was making use of schemes under the Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGREGA) to protect forest wealth.

Steps had also been taken to strengthen the Village Forest Committees, he said. Of the funds released under the MGREGA, Rs. 72 crore had been used for the purpose of protecting flora and fauna in the region, he said. The task force was seriously working towards protecting small biodiversity spots such as Devara Kadu in Kodagu and Dakshina Kannada districts and Alives in coastal districts with the support of the biodiversity, environment protection and forest conservation acts, he said. He said that conservation of the Chamundi Hills, which was taken up under a project using funds extended by the Norwegian Government, had succeeded. In order to make the hills greener, it had been decided to strengthen the Village Forest Committees, he said.

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