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INDIA NEWS

Political gains overshadowing Mekedatu's ecological impact

The project aims at generating 400 MW of renewable energy annually and can supply up to 4.75 tmcft of drinking water for Bengaluru





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By Sharan Poovanna | Edited by Shilpa Ambardar, Bengaluru

The padayatra for the proposed Mekedatu reservoir-cum-drinking water project may have been suspended but the [Close Story](#) | major political parties on the same platform as it promises rich electoral dividends.

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Meanwhile, most political parties are willing to overlook the environmental cost of the Mekedatu Balancing Reservoir and Drinking Water Project, which is adding to the steady erosion and rapid degradation of the ecology.

According to the Cauvery Neeravari Nigam Limited's draft terms of reference (as in July 2019), the Mekedatu project is aimed at generating 400 MW of renewable energy annually and can supply up to 4.75 tmcft of drinking water for Bengaluru, Karnataka's most populous city.

"Large-scale developmental activities such as constructing a series of reservoirs and dams, creating special economic zones, townships, and land conversion for



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“The forest cover now is confined to major conservation reserves such as protected areas, national parks and wildlife sanctuaries. Natural forests show a decline of evergreen forests from 7.5% (1985) to 5.7% (by 2019), moist deciduous forests from 5.7% (1985) to 4.1% (by 2019), and dry deciduous forests from 4.0% (1985) to 2.2% (2019),” he said.

A report released on Thursday by India State of Forests Report (ISFR) 2021 shows that Karnataka has lost 64sq km of moderately dense forest compared to its 2019 findings. Karnataka’s forest cover is 20.2% of the total geographical area which is



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squirrels, Deccan manseer fish and the smooth-coated otters among hundreds of other exotic — and potentially endangered — species of animals.

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While the tourism department milks its rich biodiversity to attract more tourists, over-exploitation of these resources have added to the growing environmental challenges for the southern state.

Meanwhile, experts believe that the actual situation is far more dire.

“At a time when we should be augmenting our forest ecosystem, we are depleting and plundering it. Prime Minister Narendra Modi wants to protect and preserve biodiversity, but on the contrary, we are destroying it. Ideally, 33% of the Indian landscape should be reserved for forest. But we barely have 20%,” wildlife activist Joseph Hoover said.

Karnataka has also refused to declare the Western Ghats as an eco-sensitive zone, prioritising economic interests over environmental concerns.

The Mekedatu reservoir project, proposed to be constructed at a height of nearly 100ft, can store up to 65 tmcft of water but lead to loss of green cover and



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Questioning the equitability of the project, noted rights activist Medha Patkar said, “The project’s equitability and sustainability needs to be proved before it gets a go ahead of any kind. That is not yet happening in case of Mekedatu,” Patkar said on Thursday in Bengaluru.

Bengaluru receives around 1400 million litres per day (mld) of Cauvery water and of this nearly 40% is lost in leakages due to old and dilapidated pipelines, wastage by consumers among other reasons.

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